DECEMBER 8th ISSUE, 1926
VOL. LX No. 5

ADVENTURE

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December 8th

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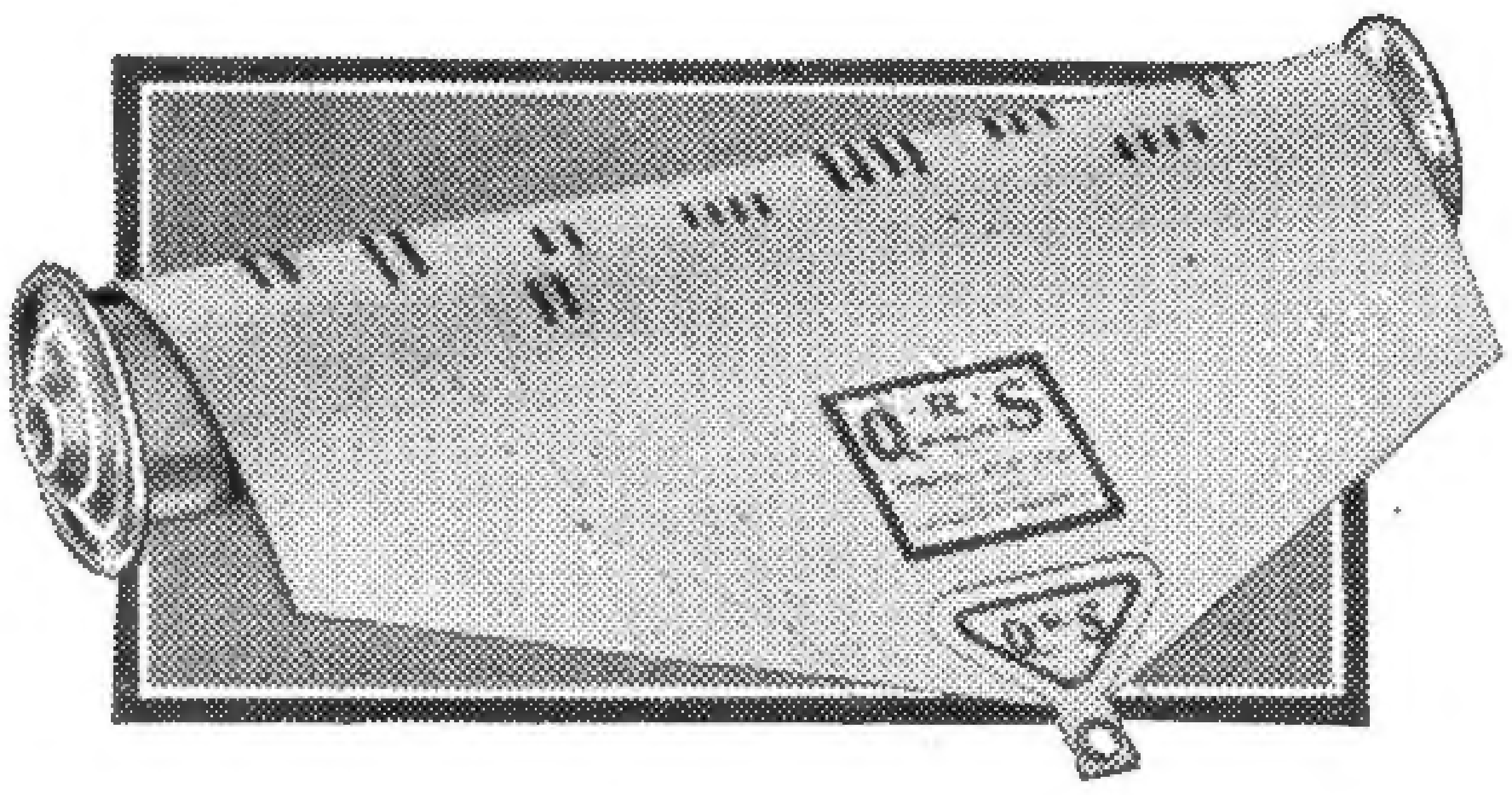

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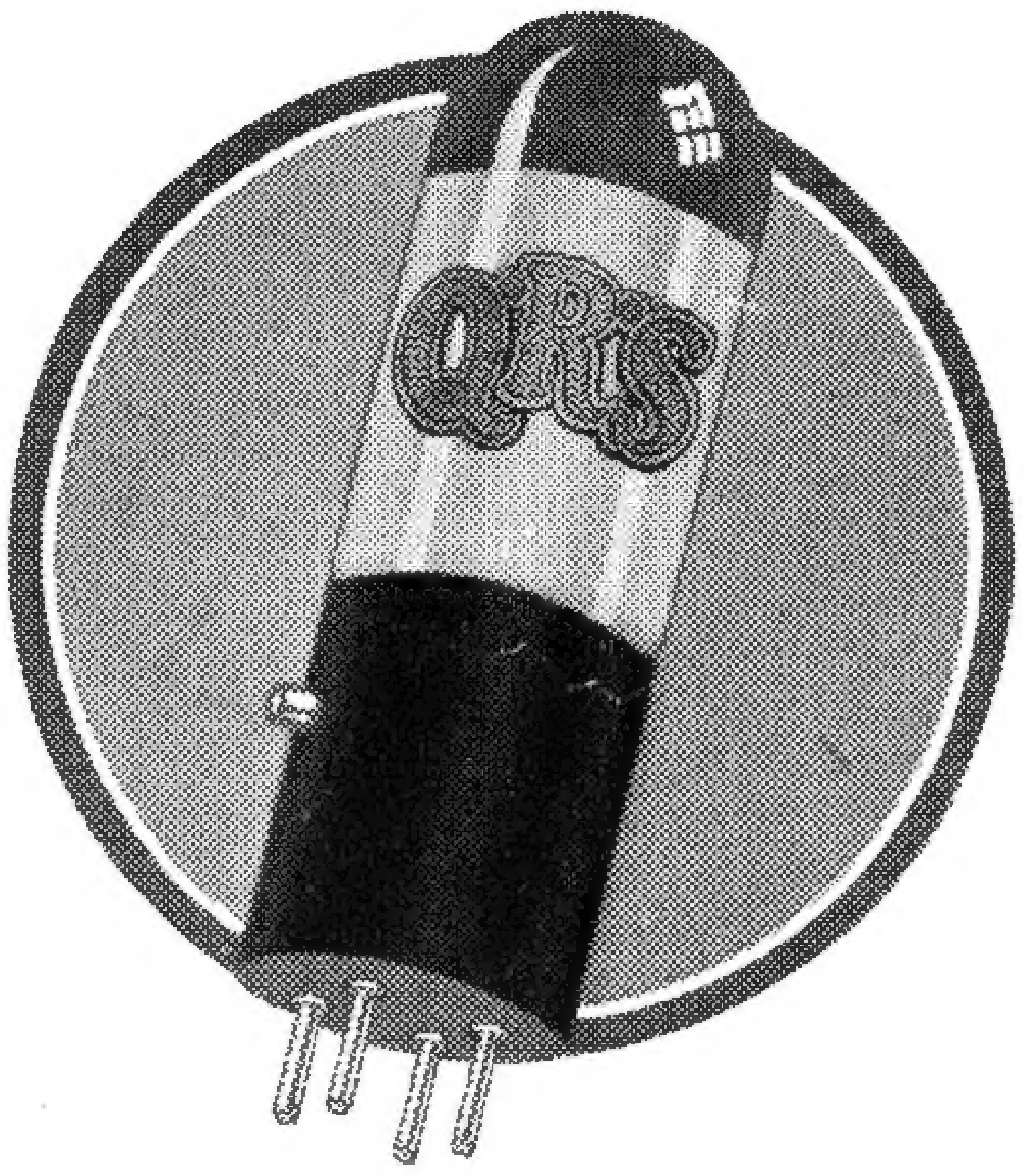

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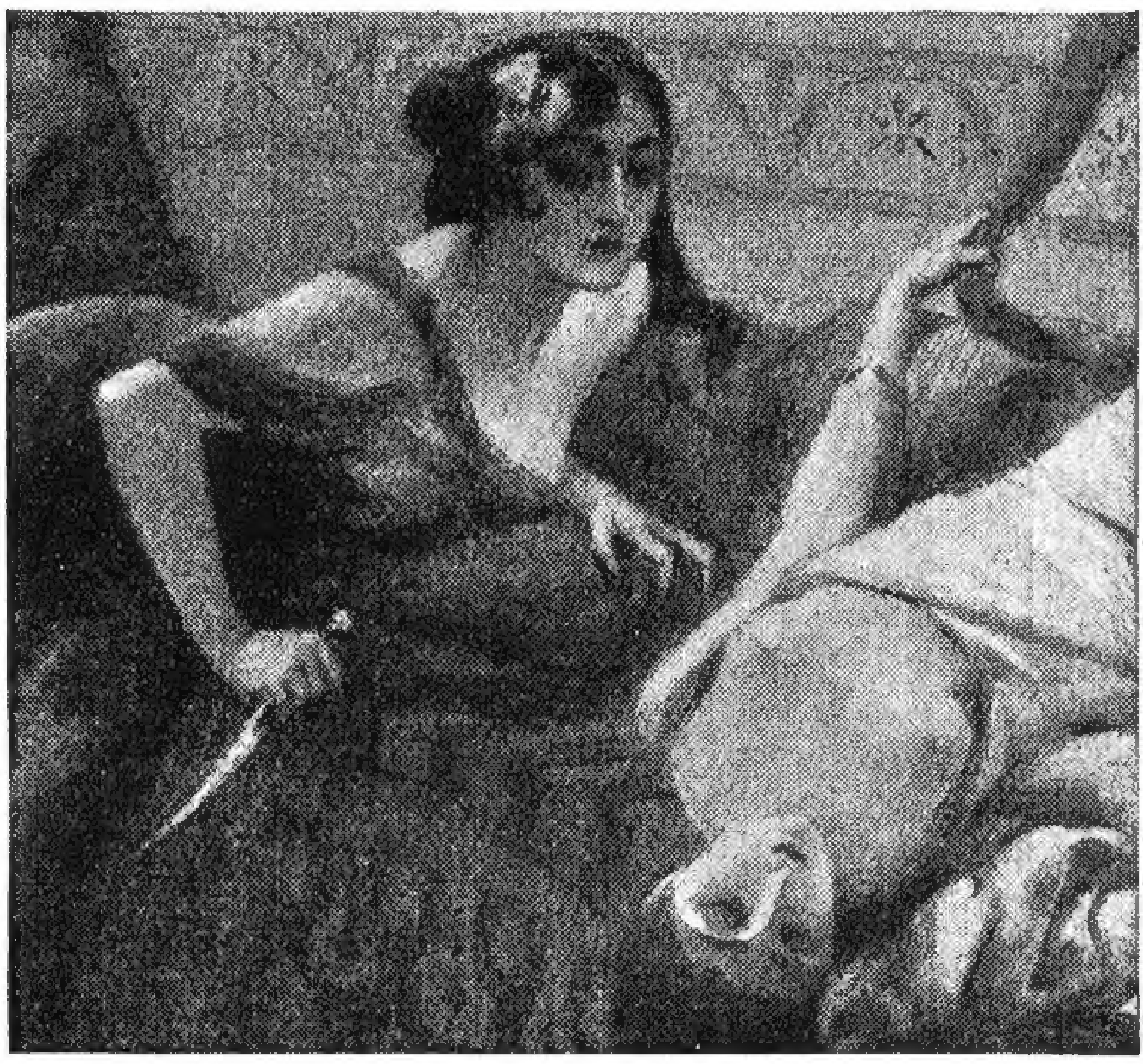

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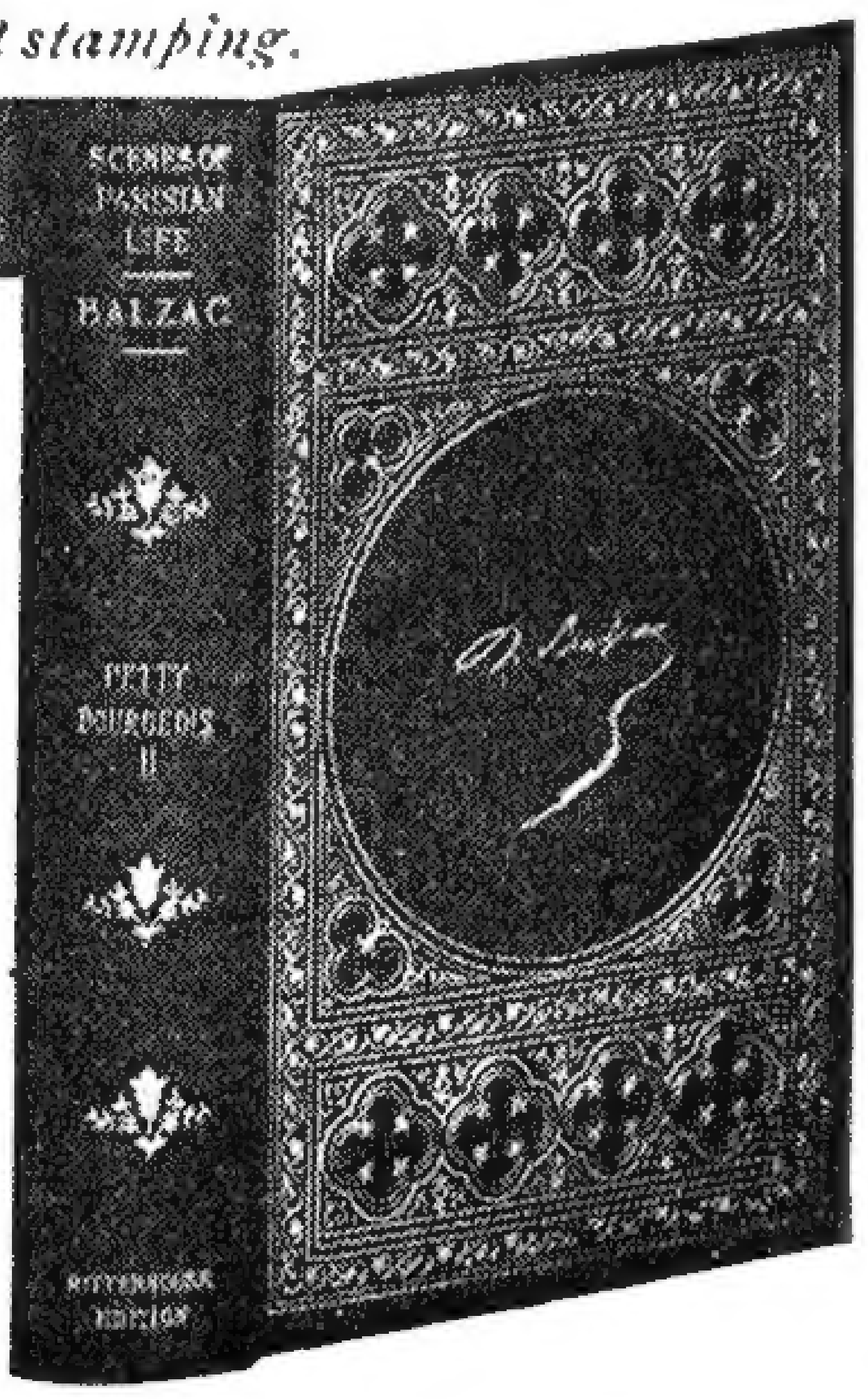

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(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Issue of December 8

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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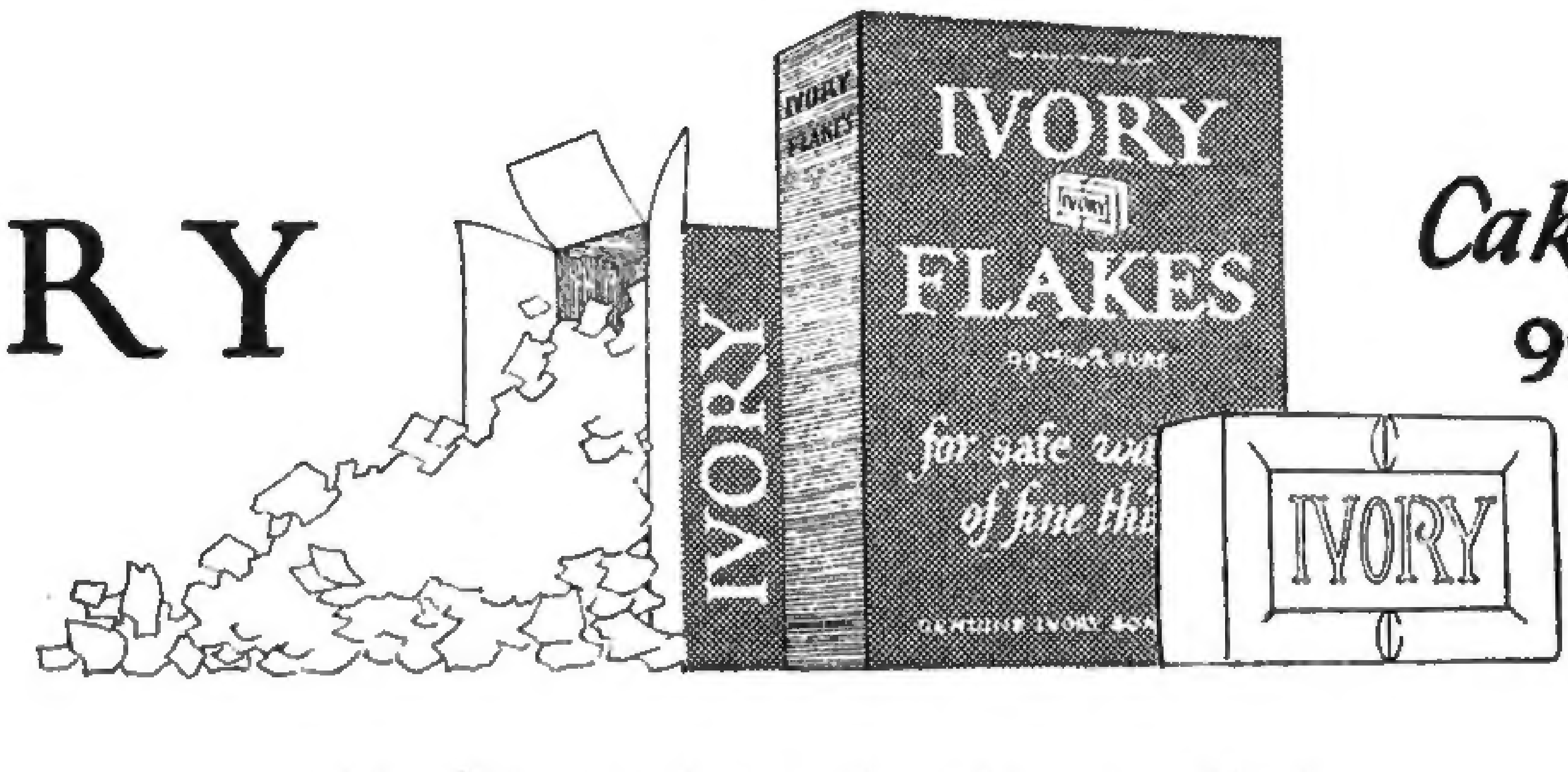
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THE MOUNTAINS ARE THE MEMBERS OF OUR FAMILY

By VACHEL LINDSAY

THE mountains are the members of our family to defend us.
They fight us by the campfire but are for us in the street.
They gather around the fire log, insulting and accusing.
They curse the cat, they kick the dog,
Step on each other's feet,
Full of open feuds with us and one another;
But when it comes to war with men
Each mountain is our brother.
In Babylon we speak of them,
Each mountain is our brother.

The White Falcon *and the false* Dmitri

Harold Lamb's

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The WOLF MASTER

I've been to Roum, and I've been to Rome,
Through the Black Mountains,
On the White Sea!
My hat is my house-top, my saddle's my home—
Hai-a—come away with me!

SONG OF THE COSSACK WANDERERS

THE streets of the village were deserted. On every hand deep snow covered the steppe; even the thatched roofs of the cottages were blanketed in white.

It was old snow, that, on the roofs and the plain. And, stretching in every direction from the cluster of dwellings and stables, tracks were to be seen. Tracks of men and horses, of carts and wide, clumsy tracks that bit deep into the gray coverlet of the steppe.

A throng of men, a multitude of horses, had left their traces around the village. But the painted doors of the taverns were shut and barred; the horn windows of the cottages showed no gleam of light, though it was the dull twilight of a midwinter's day.

It was a time of trouble, early in the seventeenth century. And to the good people of this village in the steppe, trouble had come indeed. Their faces pressed against the windows, they listened to the muttering growl of cannon and musketry in the distance.

The dogs in the stable-yards barked half-heartedly at the sound of approaching horses. Three Cossacks, plying their whips on spent ponies, galloped up to the post tavern. The youngest, who rode in advance of the others, reined in at the door and pounded on it with a pistol butt.

"*Hai chalamboùzdar*—Hi, father of a thousand slaves! Horses—give us fresh horses!"

A blur of faces was visible at the window overhead, but no answer was returned to the impatient rider. The dogs that had clustered around to yap at him gave back suddenly. Like a shadow drifting over the snow, a gray borzoi, or wolfhound, that had been following the young Cossack in the white *svitka*, turned into the tavern yard. Its ears were pricked toward the man and the horse, and only by a soundless snarl did it acknowledge the growling of the village dogs. Its massive chest and arched ribs were mud-stained and it moved with the effortless ease of the wolf that had sired it.

A second Cossack now entered the yard and dismounted from a foundered pony that stood nose to earth, legs planted wide.

"Aside, Kirdy," he grunted. "I will deal with the dog-souls."

The slender warrior in the white coat gave place to the newcomer who strode to the door and thrust his shoulder against the painted panel. He was little less than a giant, hatless, with a long broadsword strapped to his wide shoulders. Under the

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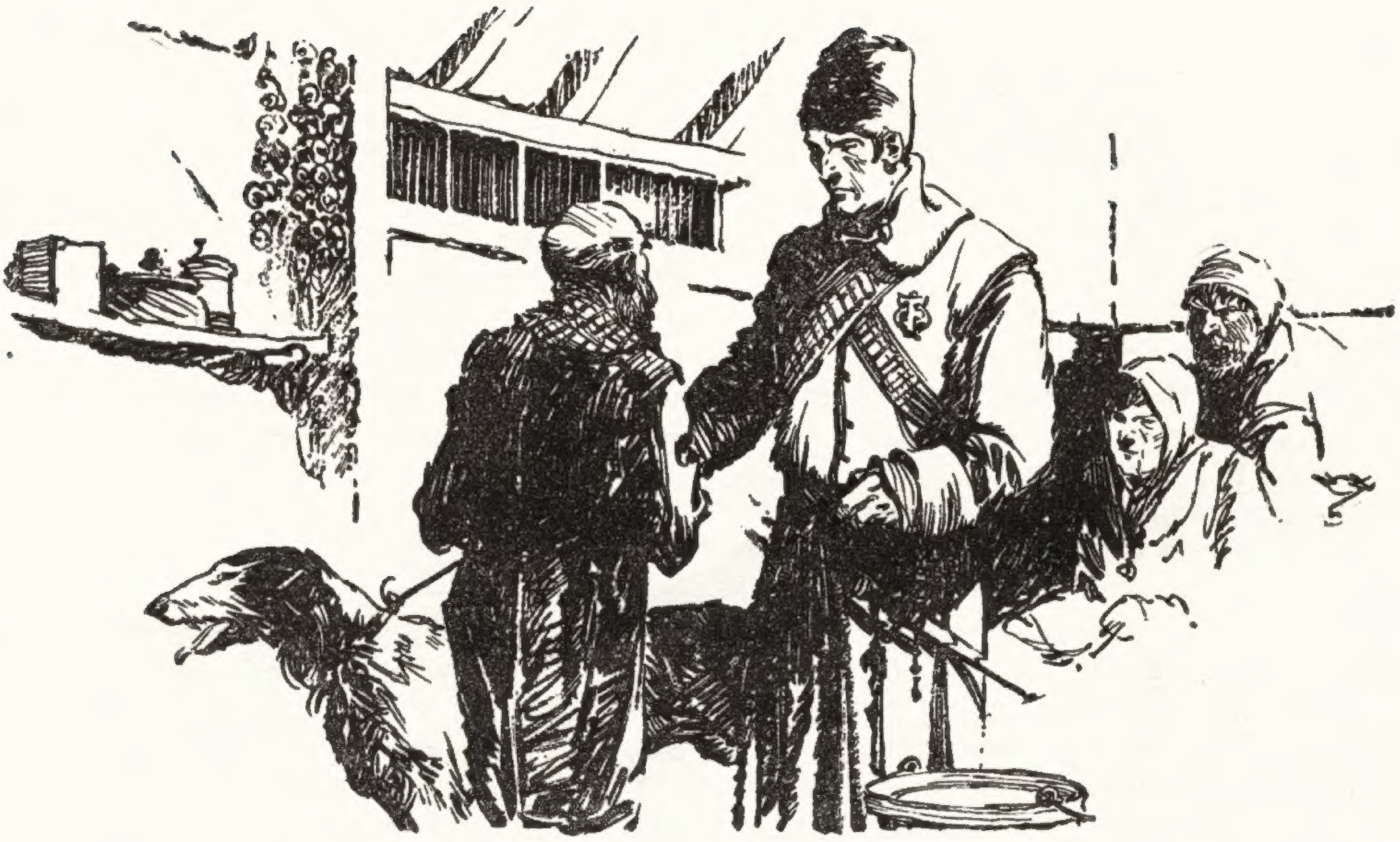


impact of his weight the door creaked ominously, and the watchers within saw fit to open the window.

"*Tchèlomdo brodiou!*" a heavy voice cried down at the Cossacks. "The forehead to you, master. We have done no harm. We are people who believe in God. What do you seek?"

"I am Ayub the Zaporoghian!" roared the giant, steam rising from his black sweat-soaked coat. "I must have a horse—three horses, for ours."

"*Ekh ma*, Master Ayub. By Saint Andrew and the good Saint Thomas, we have not a horse."

"How, not a horse?"

A shaggy, bearded head was thrust out of the window.

"We are innocent people, by all that's holy. It is true we had some beasts, for the post service. But first the noble *boyare* and the splendid Polish knights came and took their pick; then the illustrious Cossack lords came and hitched what was left to their guns. In all the *sloboda* you will find no more than these dogs."

"How long have the cannon been speaking?"

"Since the sun was at the zenith, noble sir. At dawn the army of Zaporoghian Cossacks passed through our streets to give battle to the Poles and the *boyare*."

"Hark ye, innkeeper!" The warrior called Ayub wrenched his wallet from his girdle and tossed it against the door, so that the jangle of silver coins was audible. "That's for the man who finds us three nags, now—at once!"

The head disappeared and the impatient Cossacks heard the low growl of voices in argument. When the tavern keeper looked out again, despair was written on his broad features.

"Good sir, no horse is to be had."

The two Cossacks who had ridden four hundred *versts* in four days to be present at that battle looked at each other without a word and turned by swiftly mutual consent to the third. He was an old man with shrewd gray eyes. His long white mustache fell below his stooped shoulders, and the brown skin seemed stretched and drawn over the bones of his head. Through the tears in his sheepskins a red silk shirt was visible and his baggy trousers were spotted with tar and mud, quite disregarded by their owner, who was drawing tighter the girth on his sweating pony.

He was Khlit, called the Curved Saber, and once he had been *koshevoi ataman* of all the Zaporoghian Cossacks. When he had finished his task he straightened and held up his hand.

Straining their ears, Kirdy and Ayub made out a change in the reverberation of distant conflict. The cannon had ceased firing and only the sharper impact of muskets was to be heard.

Ayub swore under his breath.

"It is nearly over, out there. Our brothers have whipped the Poles."

But in the clear eyes of the old warrior there was uncertainty and the shadow of misery.

IT WAS true that the three had come up from the Cossack steppes in the south, heedless of the fate of the horses they bestrode, as messenger pigeons seek out a spot behind the horizon, untiringly. Khlit had brought his grandson out of the mountains of Tatary, through the empire of the Moghul past the settlements of the frontier, for one purpose.

He had meant to place Kirdy among his old comrades of the Zaporoghian Siech—the best of the Cossack warriors—before he died. They had heard on the Don that the army of the Siech had taken the field against foes, and they had turned aside again seeking it. As they rode, the clouds of war settled lower upon the wilderness of the steppe, and now the clouds had broken. The time of trouble was at hand; the Cossack warriors were in the saddle, the battle was drawing to its end, and they were no nearer than this village of the Muscovites, five miles from the armies, with their horses utterly useless.

Khlit swallowed his disappointment in silence. Before long he would see his old comrades and learn from them all that had passed. He did not understand why the Cossacks should be fighting the Poles, or why the Muscovite *boyare* should be in arms. And, beyond weariness and disappointment, a foreboding was in his spirit.

"Look at Karai!" said Kirdy.

The gray wolfhound had been sitting in the middle of the courtyard, the long tail curved around its feet, eying them expectantly. Now it rose, ears pricked, and stalked to the gate.

"Horses are coming," the young Cossack announced after a moment, and they went to stand beside Karai and peer up the empty street.

Behind them a level bar of orange light divided earth from sky in the curious twilight of the northern winter, when the sky seems darker than the earth and the sun is a thing forgotten

A black mass passed between the first huts of the village and resolved itself into a detachment of horsemen. Weary men on weary beasts they were, some bearing lances, some sabers, some no weapons at all.

"They are ours," cried Ayub, staring between cupped hands. Then he lifted his deep voice in a shout. "*Hai, Kosàki!* Have you whipped the Poles?"

The leading riders came abreast the tavern, and an officer reined to one side to look more closely at the three Cossacks. He was hatless, a blood-stained shirt wrapped around his forehead.

"Are horses to be had in the village?" he asked of Ayub.

"Nay, *esaul*—not a nag."

The leader of the detachment sighed, and urged his pony on. Some of the chargers, smelling the hay in the tavern yard, neighed, and a man cursed blackly.

"Look here," demanded Ayub, "aren't you ordered to camp in the village? It's twenty *versts* to the next houses."

A bearded lancer, erect as a statue on a fine black Tatar stallion, paused long enough to spit toward the rear, and thrust his sheepskin hat on the back of his head. In silence, the advance of the Zaporoghians moved on through the village and out into the plain toward the south. Other detachments followed, and—when men fell out to light blazing fires along the street—Kirdy saw that these were men as wild as the riders of Asia.

Many of them were tall as Ayub, giants in sheepskins, their saddles and head-bands gleaming with silver. Scarce one but bore some cut or powder stain, and here and there a Cossack walked, holding a badly wounded comrade in the saddle.

"By the Horned One," Ayub groaned, "they have not whipped the Poles. Nay, they have been pounded and broken. Yonder are some of the Perieslav company, with red *kalpaks*, and men of the White Kosh itself.* Ho, brothers—where is the *ataman?*"

A young warrior who had lingered to warm himself at the nearest fire looked up with a wry smile.

"Our father Netchai died a week agone. Colonel Loboda of the White Kosh had command, until he swallowed bullets the

---

*Kosh—a Cossack camp or clan. In the seventeenth century each clan had its own villages and grazing lands, and the men of the clan joined their *kuren*, or barrack, in the Zaporoghian army. Each camp chose its own leader—*ataman* or colonel. The *koshevoi ataman* or commander-in-chief was elected at the council of the clans.

wrong way. God knows who is our *ataman.*"

"Are the Poles driving you?"

The young Cossack tightened his belt, slapped his sword-hilt and put a booted foot in the stirrup of his gray Arab.

"Nay, not the Poles, nor the *boyare.* Satan himself is back there."

With a sweeping gesture at the black sky and the gray wilderness, he sprang into the saddle and trotted off to rejoin his companions.

BY NOW the streets of the locked-in village were full of light and the roar of voices. Orders were shouted, above the snapping of the flaming wood; foragers rode in, to pile hay, grain and what not into the slow-moving carts of the *tabor*—the wagon train that made up the heart of a Zaporoghian army. Black carts, glistening wet, slid and creaked past the watchers. Long sleds, drawn by lowing oxen, appeared with cannon roped fast.

Other sleds bore loads of wounded, who sat on bearskins, smoking short clay pipes, or lay prone, twisted faces staring up blankly at the cold stars. If the Zaporoghians were defeated, they were far from routed. Some ate as they rode, from saddle-bags, and an *esaul* who had no more than three men at his back lifted his fine voice in one of the mournful songs of the south.

The tavern yard, trampled into mud, was improvised into a dressing station of the roughest sort. Tar was heated in buckets at the fires, and when a warrior with a mangled leg or arm was carried in, a saber slashed off the useless member and the stump was plunged into the bubbling tar. Others stripped off coats or trousers and suffered cuts to be plastered with mud. The slightly wounded were given cups of vodka mixed with gunpowder to quaff.

No surgeon was to be seen, and the only bandages were shirts or long sashes. When the wounded had been treated they were bundled up in *svitkas* taken from the slain, and placed again on the sledges of the wagon train, crossing themselves and breathing a jest if they were able to speak.

"No, brothers, Satan's claws ripped my hide, but the grass won't grow over me this time."

"It isn't my sword-arm you painted with tar. And the Poles will know it before another harvest."

More often it was:

"*Dai vodky*—give me vodka!"

A warrior, stripped to the waist and bleeding freely from the lower ribs, reined his horse into the station and sat staring about, frowning, resisting those who came to lift him to the fires.

"*Tchortyaka—n'a-az!*" he shouted through set teeth. "Here, you devil—take that! Where is the *ataman?* Brothers, I want to see the *ataman* and hear his voice again before I die. Nay, you dog-souls, I can still ride! Take me to the commander."

Although it was clear that his mind was wandering and he was bleeding to death, no one could move him from the saddle until Ayub came and peered into his stained face.

"It's Pavlenko, by ——!" the big Zaporoghian shouted. "Many's the time we've dried out a barrel together. Come down, Pavlenko, and let the lads wrap you up. You were always a quarrelsome dolt. Here!"

Reaching out swiftly, Ayub caught the saber of the delirious warrior close to the hilt and pulled strongly. Pavlenko swayed and tumbled into the arms of his former comrade. Heedless of the blood that spattered his garments, Ayub bore him to one of the groups around the fires, while Pavlenko's charger snorted and pawed at the slush.

Kirdy, a stranger to these men, tended their fire in silence, followed wherever he went by the wolfhound, Karai.

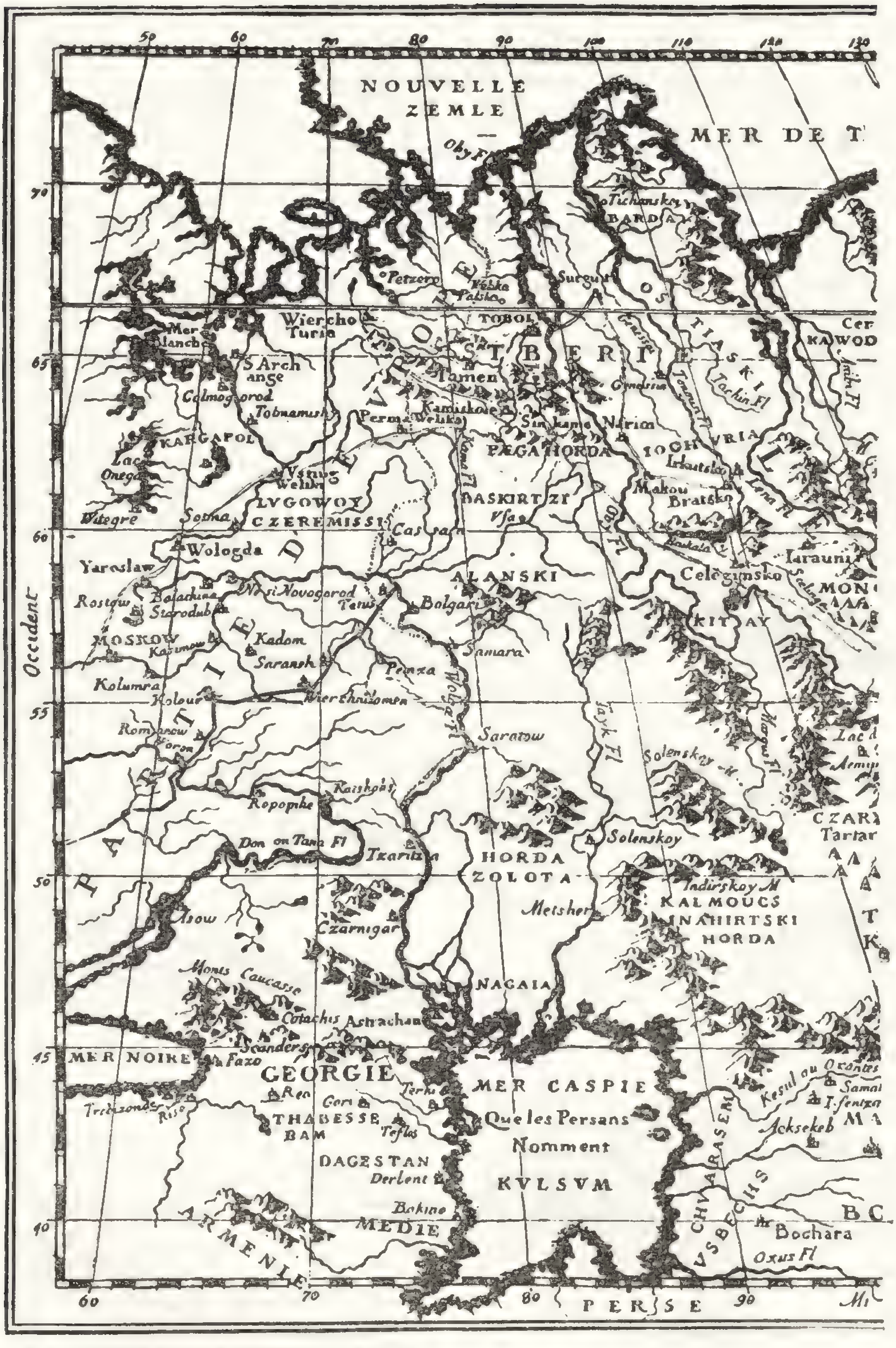
At the gate Khlit stood, peering at the passing *tabor.* For ten years he had been away from the Siech, and all these faces were unknown to him. Even the *esauls* passed the old Cossack by without a glance of recognition. He had outlived his generation and his comrades lay now out on the steppe, their bones stripped by vulture and wolf and dried by the sun.

He watched silently until a sled halted at the gate and three lancers lifted from it a slender officer in a red *svitka* heavily sewn with gold. The boots of this man were fine shagreen, though caked with mud, and he gripped firmly an ivory baton with a small gold cross.

"Way for the father, lads," they cried, and Khlit came to the fire to look keenly into the wasted brown face of the wounded chief.

"Colonel Loboda," he growled.

"Don't take my coat off, by ——!" The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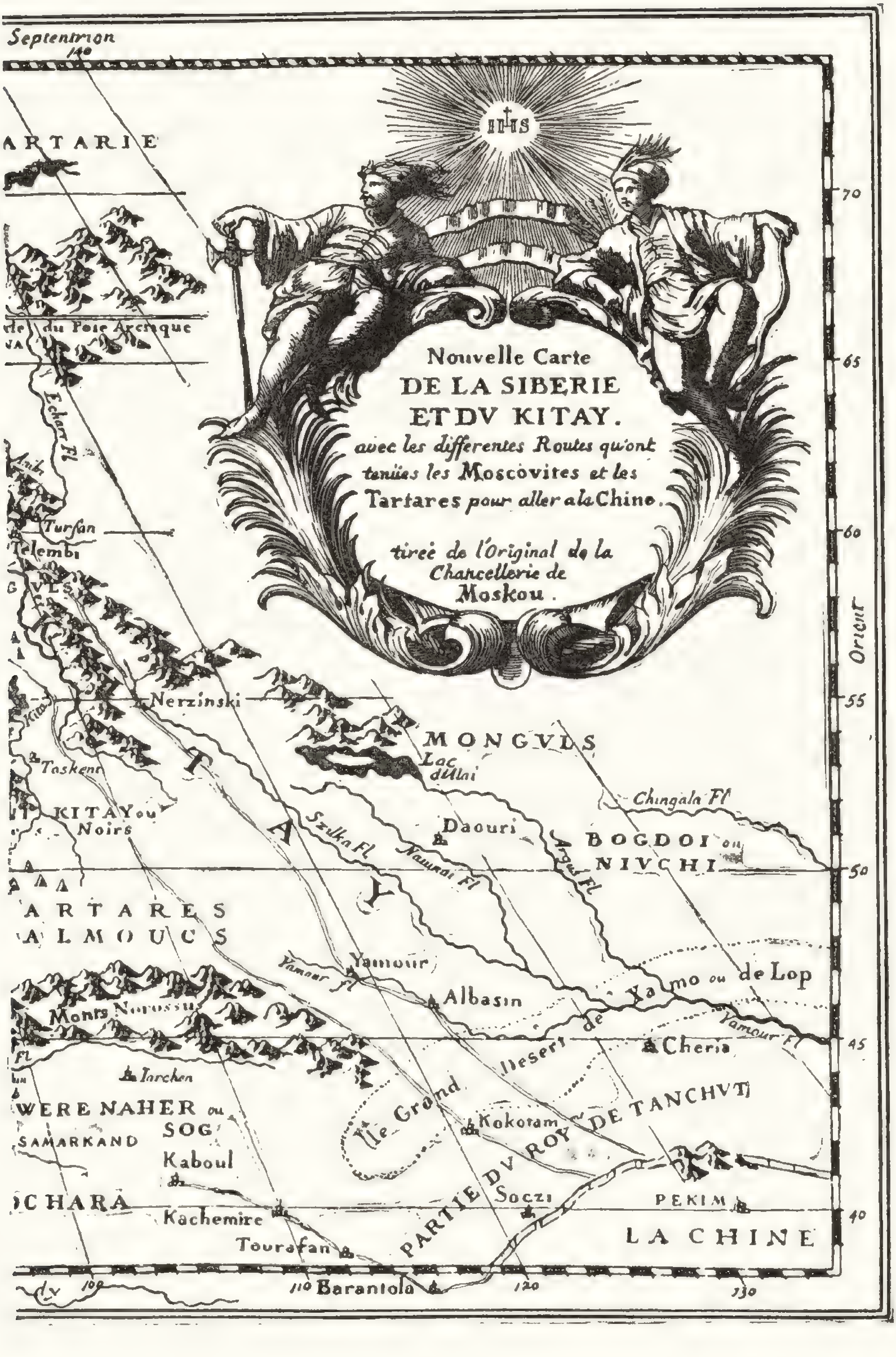
Septentrion
140
ARTARIE
du Pole Arctique
Echarr Fl
Tursan
Telembi
Nerzinski
Taskent
KITAY ou Noirs
ARTARES
ALMOUCS
Monts Norossu
Tarchen
WERE NAHER ou SOG
SAMARKAND
Kaboul
CHARA
Kachemire
Tourafan
Barantola
Nouvelle Carte
DE LA SIBERIE
ET DV KITAY.
avec les differentes Routes qu'ont tenües les Moscovites et les Tartares pour aller ala Chine.
tirée de l'Original de la Chancellerie de Moskou.
MONGVLS
Lac d'Alai
Daouri
Chingala Fl
BOGDOI ou NIVCHI
Szilka Fl
Nauwai Fl
Argu Fl
Yamour Fl
Yamour
Albasin
Yamo ou de Lop
Le Grand Desert de
Cheria
Kokotam
PARTIE DV ROY DE TANCHVT
Soczi
PEKIM
LA CHINE
Yamour Fl
Orient
70
65
60
55
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45
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100
110
120
130

Cossack grunted through set lips. "It's of no account, my children. Where are the *kuren atamans?* Where's Ivashko, the One-Eyed? Well then, summon whoever is leading the Black Kosh."

Khlit, glancing through the gate, saw that the rear guard had dismounted in the street—some five hundred riders on black horses, wearing mail under their *svitkas.* Their chargers seemed fresh, and they kept more than a semblance of formation. But the officer who came at Loboda's call was only a youth, flushed and silent.

And at sight of him the veteran colonel, who had been placed on a bearskin near the blaze, frowned thoughtfully. Loboda had been shot twice through the body and only by an effort of iron will could he keep his thoughts on the Cossack regiments, clearly, as the need was. He could not outlive the night, he knew, and the fate of six thousand survivors of the army rested on his choice of a new commander. From the young warrior who had taken charge of the Black Kosh, his eyes went to Khlit and he passed a quivering hand across his forehead.

"Hey, are you Mazeppa? Nay, he went out of his saddle at the second charge. They had too many cannon—"

He broke off to listen. No longer were reports of muskets heard. The *tabor* had passed on, and snow was beginning to fall, drifting into the glow of the fires and sinking into the mud of the courtyard. Out of the curtain of drifting flakes a stout priest strode, booted and belted, his long black robe tucked up into his belt, his cape drawn over his head.

"Nay, Loboda, Mazeppa gave up his soul in these arms. His squadrons are scattered among the others. Stojari sent me from the *tabor.* He asks—" the priest hesitated—"that you come with the baton because the brothers are saying up ahead that you were cut down."

He looked curiously at Khlit, who had stepped forward.

"Colonel Loboda," the wanderer said again.

This time the *ataman* peered at him closely, and his thin lips parted.

"Nay—ten thousand devils! Are the angels sending couriers from above so swiftly? You are Khlit, you old dog! The Curved Saber—I played with that sword when I was a fledgling."

He lay back, still frowning.

"Well, if you have come with a summons—I'll ride with you. You died in Cathay, when I was an *esaul.*"

The priest crossed himself and laid his hand on Khlit's shoulder. Then he bent over the wounded colonel.

"Nay, my son—this is a living man, whoever he be."

"It is true, Loboda," nodded Khlit. "Many winters have gone by since these eyes saw the Mother Siech. Alone among the Cossacks you know my face."

"Then bring vodka. We'll drink, eh, Khlit? Come lads, a stirrup cup to Loboda."

The strong spirits cleared his brain for a moment and he motioned for his cup to be filled again. This time Kirdy brought it, and kneeled to hold it to the colonel's lips. Loboda's eye, caught by the glitter of the jewels in the hilt of the young warrior's saber, blinked reflectively.

"That should be Khlit's blade—I know it well. Who are you, *oùchar?*"

"It is the White Falcon, Loboda," Khlit responded moodily. "The Don Cossacks gave him that name, and I brought the lad hither from the Don to show him to the sir brothers in the Siech. The sword that was the blade of Kaidu is his because he can use it well—"

"If it had cut down Satan it would have served us," Loboda whispered. "But that time is past. Not a blade but the wisdom of a wolf is needed now by the brothers who still live."

And he turned with an effort, considering Khlit and the red-cheeked priest who held in both hands the ikon that hung from the silver chain at his throat.

"Will the Poles and the *boyare* follow up their victory?" Khlit muttered, pulling at his mustache. "Have they many squadrons? What kind of leader?"

The sight of Loboda who had reveled with him in the Cossack camp had brought back to the veteran the memory of the times when he had led the army against Turk and Tatar. He spoke to the priest but it was the colonel who answered.

"A leader? Back yonder they have the *Tchortiaka,* the Archfiend, for commander."

"*Aya tak,*" nodded the priest—"Aye, so."

"He is a Cossack!" Loboda muttered, and spat weakly.

Khlit started and bent to look into the eyes of the stout priest.

"A Cossack wars against his brothers? That has never been!"

"Until now," put in the priest sadly. "But he is also a monk. And he calls himself an emperor."

If the quiet priest had not added his word to that of Loboda, Khlit would have thought the dying colonel was out of his mind—it did not occur to the wanderer that Loboda might be finding excuses for the defeat of that day. A Cossack commander is the servant of the Siech and his brothers. If he fails—as some must do—he gives up the baton of his own accord and no voice is raised to blame him.

Sudden coughing choked Loboda, and when he could breathe freely again, his lips had grown pallid.

"Thirty thousand free-born Cossacks followed him to the north. Now only six thousand have breath in them—Khlit. He was a traitor. *Batko* Andriev will tell—Khlit, lead the brothers to the Siech!"

"Nay, Colonel Loboda—I can no longer strike with a sword."

"Take this! Who is to take it, if you do not?"

The *ataman* held out the ivory baton, and for a moment Khlit bent his head in thought. He had no conception of the forces in the field against the Cossacks, of the route to be taken, or Loboda's plans. Yet he knew that this night the council of the clans could not be summoned to choose a new *ataman*. The need was instant, and hesitation was not a part of him.

"I will take it," he said gravely, his eyes on the face of his comrade.

Loboda put the baton in his gaunt fingers, and Khlit thrust it straightway into his belt, turning to the young officer of the Black Kosh.

"You hold the rear. Have you pickets out?"

"Aye, father—" the warrior addressed Khlit as the new commander without a shadow of doubt. "One on either side the road, half a *verst* in the fields. A detachment of thirty back along the road—"

"Go to the detachment. I will send a man, when we move on."

"At command!"

The youth of the Black Kosh grasped his saber and ran to the gate, calling for his horse. Ayub, hearing the stir, came in from the street, where he had been searching for a sled. When he saw the prostrate Loboda, and the baton in Khlit's belt, he halted as if struck by a bullet. For months he had ridden beside the old wanderer, had shared blankets and porridge-pot with him; but now he saw that Khlit had been made leader of the Cossacks and he spoke to him as to the *koshevoi ataman* of the Siech.

"Father," he said anxiously, "I have a *kounak*, a comrade who has been left at the fire because he is stubborn. As God lives, he must not be left to be tortured by the Poles—"

"A three-horse sled has been kept for Loboda. The horses are being fed, down the street. Bring it—put the Cossack in it, with the colonel. Take ten men from the Black Kosh. Follow the wagon train, a *verst* to the rear."

The giant Zaporoghian plunged back into the drift, and Loboda raised himself on one elbow, a gleam in his sunken eyes.

"Aye," he whispered, "shepherd the lads—south, Khlit. Forget not the Cossack dead—swear to me that the traitor who betrayed us—"

A fit of coughing swept him and when it was gone he could not even whisper. Khlit understood what he wished.

"I swear that he will die by a Cossack sword."

And when the sled whirled up out of the snow curtain, and Loboda was placed in it beside the unconscious Pavlenko, he was smiling upon set teeth. The dying men were covered with bearskins, a Cossack mounted the off-horse of the three, and Ayub sprang into the saddle of Pavlenko's charger.

But Khlit sought out Loboda's black stallion that had been led in after the colonel. He reined through the gate in advance of the sled, and checked the stallion back sharply.

"*Hai-a!*" He lifted his deep voice in a cry that carried the length of the street. "*Kosh po sotnyam—ra-ab!* Kosh into squadrons—form!"

Dimly seen figures started up, and the nearest, running to their mounts, peered at the lean rider on the colonel's charger who gave a command like a chief of Cossacks. The appearance of the gray-haired warrior, out of the storm itself, had an aspect of the miraculous, and the tired men closed up the formation, dressed the ranks and stared at their new leader with expectancy.

When the clinking of bit chains, the

creaking of leather and muttered words of the sergeants had ceased, Khlit rode out in front of the Black Kosh. Although he could see no more than the first lines of the leading *sotnia,* he knew that some five hundred riders were drawn up in place waiting for his next command.

"*Pvar Kosh sably pet!*" he roared. "Swords up! The salute of the regiment!"

A sudden scraping of steel, a rustle of heavy coats, and the firelight from the gate of the tavern yard gleamed on upflung sabers.

But Khlit did not take the salute himself. The Cossack who had reined in the sled at the gate snapped his whip and the three horses plunged forward, passing the motionless ranks, and vanished into the white curtain where Ayub waited with his ten.

Loboda had taken for the last time the salute of his Cossacks.

"Sheathe sabers! Dismount."

With a word to the sergeant on the flank of the first squadron Khlit trotted back to the inn-yard where the hooded priest and Kirdy were standing by the hissing embers of the fire.

"*Hai, batko*—Hi, little grandfather," the new *ataman* said, "tell me of this Archfiend who has broken faith with the brotherhood, and of the battle this day. Be swift, because we ride forth at any moment."

CHAPTER II

THE TALE OF BATKO ANDRIEV

WHEN Ivan the Terrible, Tsar of Muscovy, Lord of Novgorod, and of Sibir, died some twenty years before, he left in the world two sons—an elder, Feodor and a lusty youngster Dmitri. He left, too, a councilor, Boris Godunov, wise beyond his generation and ambitious.

Feodor was saint-like and weak. Boris reigned as regent in Moscow until the ailing Feodor passed to his grave. And a courtier of Boris' was believed to have slain the boy Dmitri. At all events, Dmitri vanished, and in the next years it was seen that a curse was on the land. Famine stalked from the tundras of the north to the deserts of the south. Men said this was retribution for the deed that opened Boris' path to the throne. Dmitri, the last prince of the line of Rurik, had been slain.

And when the usurper Boris died—as he soon did—men said that the murder of Dmitri had been a curse upon him.

There was now no one to sit in the eagle throne of the Kremyl at Moscow. The *boyare* would not tolerate the son of Godunov. The time of trouble began.

Then Dmitri reappeared, a living man, at the gates of Moscow.

Out of the Monastery of the White Lake he came—where he had been sequestered since he was a child. He had broken his vows as a monk and had wandered off to join the brotherhood of the Zaporoghian Cossacks. A bold rider, a wild spirit at revelry, and a youth of wit and daring, he had won his place in the hearts of the Cossacks.

From their camp he had gone to Poland, to the powerful King Sigismund, who had ambitions of his own. Dmitri's name had remained a secret until then—until, gravely stricken by sickness, he had confessed his origin to a Jesuit priest, saying that a slave child had been slain by mistake for himself. He had shown a jeweled cross given him by his parents, explaining that servants had hidden him in the monastery during the life of Boris Godunov.

Whether or not the king of the Poles believed his story, Sigismund saw at once that Dmitri would be a weapon in his hand. Dmitri was honored, and at the news of the death of Boris, was sent into Muscovy with an army of Polish nobles. He summoned his old companions, the Zaporoghian Cossacks, and they rallied to him. Battles were fought, but the *boyare* of Moscow were as ready to receive the young Dmitri as to fight against him. The gates were opened to him.

Over a land famine-ridden, among a stricken people, Dmitri rode laughing to his throne. The widow of Ivan was sent for, and embraced him, acknowledging him for her son. It seemed as if the time of trouble were past and done with.

Dmitri plunged into the task of ruling as if it had been a new pastime. He was Tsar—autocrat of many million souls. Instead of riding in the imperial cortège, he galloped through the streets on his Kabarda horses; he drank deep of nights, sitting with the foreign officers. Sham battles between the stolid Muscovite regiments and the German mercenaries were his pleasure. Where the holy images should have stood in his bedchamber, he hung a grinning mask. Always he laughed.

His wife, a Polish princess, arrived in Moscow attended by other regiments of King Sigismund. With these and the Germans Dmitri surrounded himself. He placed taxes on the monasteries to pay his soldiery.

And when it became clear to the Cossacks that Dmitri was ready to give their land to the Poles and King Sigismund, they left Moscow. At once the Tsar sent his armies after them.

"FOUR battles in the snow—three charges of armored hussars repulsed—a retreat of four hundred miles, and still the Cossack array is not broken. Powder gone, to the last grains—horses bleeding at the veins from lack of forage—the brothers have not yielded."

So said the priest Andriev, while his black eyes sparkled and the white flakes gleamed like jewels in his long beard. Khlit lifted his head suddenly. Scattered musket shots sounded in the north, and the dog Karai got up to move to the gate.

"For a *batko*," said Khlit grimly, "you know much—of kings and thrones."

The beard of the stout little priest twitched as he grinned and his red cheeks broadened.

"I? Nay, I am no more than the little father of the Cossacks. Yet, *ataman*, when sin rises before the eyes like a gray fiend—I see! All these matters were told me by one who did not lie. *Ohai!*" Andriev shook his head savagely. "He did not lie."

"Who was he?"

"A Jesuit—the same black robe who took the confession of Dmitri in Poland—an enemy of all orthodox believers. A servant of the red hats in Rome who would make slaves of the free brothers. Harken, Khlit—before the first battle near Moscow we made prisoners of some Poles who were on their way to Warsaw. Among them was this black robe. The brothers would have burned him, because his accursed people burned Netchai our father in a brazen bull. But he ran to me and prayed for his life, saying that he could reveal to us a secret that would aid the Cossacks. First he told me all this that I have said. And then—"

Andriev glanced to right and left and drew closer to the old Cossack.

"This Dmitri," he said, "is not the son of Ivan the Terrible."

"Not the Tsar!" Khlit peered into the round red face of the little *batko*.

"*Ohai*—he has been crowned as Tsar. In the church of Michael the Archangel, he was blessed and given the three crowns, and the princes of Muscovy kissed his hand. I saw it. But he is an impostor—a youth of wit and daring, who broke his vows of the monastery and said that he was Dmitri, the son of Ivan Grodznoi."

The little priest crossed himself and sighed.

"His real name is Gregory Otrèpiev."

"Otrèpiev," Khlit repeated thoughtfully. For ten years his wanderings had led him from the Siech, and all these events were strange to him. But in Cathay and Ind he had seen men staking lives and treasure for a throne.

"The empress-mother acknowledged him—"

"She is old—she was persuaded," Andriev responded sadly. "The Jesuit admitted it—when his throat was pricked with steel."

"Is he dead?"

"Nay, I had pledged him life. Yet when our father Netchai heard the truth he went to the Tsar's majesty and cried out, 'False Dmitri!' Then swords were drawn, and Netchai was taken and given to the Poles to play with. They kindled fire and roasted him. And Otrèpiev began to hunt the Cossacks down—"

"Who else knows the truth?"

"King Sigismund, almost of a surety. Some of the Muscovite princes suspect, but while they eat from gold dishes at Otrèpiev's table they are well enough content—"

"Enough!" Khlit closed his eyes for a moment, striding up and down before the stout, hooded priest. In his mind's eye the old Cossack beheld stark treachery. He saw traitors in the palaces of the Kremyl; a Polish woman empress—the splendid armies of Poland encroaching on the fertile Cossack steppes, eager for land and slaves.

In truth Otrèpiev, the false Tsar, was troubled by neither hesitation nor remorse. He had turned, as a snake strikes, upon the Cossacks, who had joined him as allies at his plea. Now, as a bone is thrown to a dog to quiet it, he would throw the Cossack lands to the Poles—as the reward of their aid.

Deep in his throat the *ataman* growled, and Andriev looked up.

"Ay, father," the priest said, "it is a black hour. Did not the impostor Otrèpiev cast down the ikons from the stand and put in their stead a grinning mask? God's anger is like a storm upon the Muscovites."

"Yet the Archfiend lives," put in Kirdy, speaking for the first time—and Khlit turned upon him, to stare grimly at his grandson.

"What was Loboda's plan?" he asked of the priest.

"To draw back, like a wolf, into the steppes, to muster new forces—"

"Against the Poles, the Lithuanians and the Muscovites!" Khlit threw back his head and laughed impatiently. "Nay, we are bait, to be cast from one to the other! We are so many heads of men and cattle to be roped and sold! To draw back is to invite a thrust. We must strike," he added slowly, "at least one blow."

"With what?" Andriev stretched out his strong hands helplessly.

Khlit stalked to the gate and summoned a Cossack to ride back to the detachment, and order all patrols to draw in on the *kosh*.

WHEN the veteran *ataman* returned to the fire he stopped beside Kirdy.

"It is time," he said. "We must take the road. You have no horse. You will not need one, lad."

To this Kirdy made no response, but the priest uttered an exclamation of surprize.

"An hour ago," Khlit went on quietly, "I made a pledge to Colonel Loboda—that the traitor should die by a Cossack sword. Then, I did not know his name. An oath is an oath. Otrèpiev joined the brotherhood of the free Cossacks. Then he betrayed his brothers and gave to the fire Netchai, the *ataman*. Death to him!"

Kirdy bent his head in understanding. Andriev cried out in protest.

"Nay, father—do not send a Cossack, your grandson, to die. No man could win through the guards of the Tsar, to stab him."

"Otrèpiev is not a Tsar, but a traitor. Nay, Kirdy is a match for any man with a sword, and a sword will deal with the false Dmitri—" Khlit touched the hilt of the curved saber at the young warrior's side, the same that he had worn in other days—"My sword and my honor—go with you, lad. This is the blow we must strike."

"But how—"

"How looks he—this Otrèpiev, *batko?*"

Andriev swallowed his misgiving and searched his memory.

"Shorter by half a head than this White Falcon, but stalwart. No older, surely. His face is shaven smooth, and his skin is brown. Like a restive horse, he always moves his hands or limbs."

"Aye, so. But he bears some mark upon him?"

"A mark? Well, there is a wart or mole under the right eye, near the nose."

Even while speaking Khlit had been feeling under his girdle, and now he handed a small leather sack to Kirdy.

"Jewels—take them to the Jews. Change your garments, hide your sword. You, who have come hither from the Gobi, can appear as a Mongol lord among the Muscovites. You only, among the brothers, can do this. Do not come to me until Otrèpiev is dead."

He had taken the rein of the waiting charger, and now he swung into the saddle as the Cossack who had gone for the patrols trotted through the tavern gate.

"Is the detachment back in ranks?"

"Aye, father."

"Then take this *batko* up behind."

Although grief tugged at the heart of the old *ataman*, he walked his horse in silence to the street, Kirdy striding beside him. Then, pretending to adjust a stirrup strap, he leaned down.

"Kirdy, I can not leave any of the brothers with you. They would be smelled out—Ayub beyond all. Your road is dark, Cossack, be wary."

Searchingly, questioningly, he glanced at the silent figure beside him.

"Aye, *ataman*," Kirdy's clear untroubled voice made response.

Satisfied, Khlit reined on, although for a moment he saw nothing of what was before him. For years he had led Kirdy through hardships—had seen him suffer—had tested his courage in a hundred ways. Out of the youth he had forged a weapon. And this weapon, so evenly tempered, had touched his own spirit at parting.

"I have made a Cossack of him," he thought. "But has he a heart?"

A moment later he flung an order over his shoulder.

"Forward, the *kosh!* Trot! Singers to the front—the song of the Siech!"

With bowed head Kirdy leaned against

the gate-post, Karai curled up in the snow at his feet. Eagerly he listened to the song of the marching Cossacks. He had crossed a continent to join these brothers, and within two hours he was left alone. A twinge of sadness touched him. But to the eye of an onlooker—if any had seen him in the murk of the falling snow—he seemed lost in contemplation. He had a task to perform, and with Kirdy that left no room for consideration of other matters. He must go to the false Tsar and measure swords with him.

When the first patrols of the Dobrudja Tatars in advance of the Vishnevetski regiments entered the streets of the village, riding slowly with keen eyes peering into the snow curtain, they saw neither man nor dog, but only the deserted courtyard of a silent tavern.

CHAPTER III

I've hunted the wolf—I've coursed the stag,
  Over the prairies
  Of Tatary.
The eagle's my brother, the wild horse my nag—
  Hai-a—come and hunt with me!

LEASHING his whip-end about Karai's stalwart neck, Kirdy glanced up and down the street and crossed it, seeking a huddle of cattle-sheds that he had noticed when he entered the village. Stooping, he made his way among restless steers and vociferating calves until he was conscious of an odor more penetrating than that of fouled straw or penned cattle. With a booted foot he felt in a manure heap until he touched something solid and heavy.

"Up, *chlop*—up, animal, and tell me where the Jew's hole is."

A man arose from hiding and bowed up and down like a marionette, breathing gustily between teeth that chattered.

"*Tlck! tlck!* Be merciful, your Illustriousness. It is true that the Jews will give the noble-born warrior better plunder than we poor orthodox believers. Only come—*tlck*—this way!"

The frightened peasant led Kirdy through the sheds and pointed out a nest of high wooden buildings that seemed to be falling in upon themselves. Kirdy climbed a fence that Karai leaped without effort, and made his way into what his nose told him was a Jewish back door. Here the darkness was, if possible, more impenetrable than under the sheds, and the reek was of cookery and unwashed wool. With the tip of his scabbard Kirdy probed piles of trash and garments until Karai growled suddenly, and the Cossack reached down to seize a human leg clad in a long woolen stocking.

He changed his grip to the collar of his captive's *shuba* and warned the Jew in a whisper to be quiet and conduct him to the *crâl* or head man of the colony. The request was emphasized by a touch of the sheathed saber—Kirdy would not have touched the steel blade to such a being for any need whatsoever.

The invisible man went at a half trot through halls cluttered with quilts and pots, up stairs where rats scampered away, up a ladder where Kirdy was obliged to carry the wolfhound under his free arm, over a covered gallery into a dark loft and stale, warm air. A woman squealed at the glowing eyes of the wolfhound, and Kirdy voiced a warning:

"Strike a light, one of you. No harm, if you obey. Otherwise you will feel the fangs of the borzoi, the wolf chaser."

A patter of whispers was followed by a scramble, and flint flashed against tinder. A candle flamed up and the young Cossack saw that he was in an attic filled with old men, women and children scattered among piles of goods. From the rafters hung legs of mutton, strings of onions and mysterious articles of Jewish attire. Half a hundred dark eyes fastened instantly on the tall youth, and—in spite of deadly fear—gauged to a nicety the worth of his ermine coat, his wide velvet trousers, gold embroidered boots and splendid girdle.

An elder in a ragged *shuba* came forward, holding his head on one side, his long cap in his gaunt hands—an ancient being scarred with pockmarks, with one eye half closed and the other shrewd and brilliant as the eye of a fox.

"Yusyski is my name, your honor. Only tell in what way my people can serve the noble knight."

"If one of your brood leaves the loft, you will die, Yusyski. Come with me. Take the candle."

Placing Karai at the end of the gallery, where the gray dog sniffed and growled alternately—relishing the human nest as little as his master—Kirdy made Yusyski overhaul piles of garments upon the shelves. Here were articles of miserable and costly attire taken from lords and Gipsies alike because the Jews dealt with all the world and no one escaped their clutches. So far, Kirdy saw, they were not aware that the Cossacks had abandoned the village.

He made a selection of clothing with care, and then overhauled a dozen outer coats, and Yusyski groaned when he chose a dark sable with voluminous sleeves and a lining of yellow satin. Sending the old Jew before him, he entered the gallery and went to the loft of the other building which was deserted. Here he stripped off his splendid ermine *svitka*, the gift of Boris Godunov, his boots, and in a moment stood utterly naked, his sword near his right hand.

And as swiftly he began to dress while Yusyski watched in subdued amazement. First Kirdy slipped a white silk shirt over his long, muscular body, then wrapped himself from ankles to neck in lengths of the same stuff; after putting on a sleeveless black tunic that reached to his knees—over wide damask trousers—he donned a short quilted vest, heavily embroidered. Finally he drew on the sable outer coat and a round velvet hat with a long peacock feather rising from its crown.

"I swear," cried Yusyski, "the noble Cossack has taken for himself some of the garments of the Kitaian prince who was frozen to death down on the Volga. It will cost the noble lord seventy gold ducats!"

In fact Kirdy now stood arrayed as a Cathayan or Mongol youth of high rank. He had not been able to find the proper velvet footgear but contented himself with a pair of Muscovite half-boots which were inconspicuous and much more serviceable.

"A razor and warm water, Yusyski," he ordered.

For the last moments the Jew had been using his ears to advantage. He heard horsemen in the streets—heard Muscovites shouting back and forth—the creaking of carts and the stamp and ring of armored squadrons. Lights were springing up, visible through the cracks in the loft. It was clear to Yusyski that the Cossacks were no longer in the village and the Tsar's forces had entered.

"Seventy ducats!" he repeated more boldly. He had heard Kirdy's wallet ring heavily when it was thrown on the floor and he had guessed very closely at the contents. "Then we will talk of a razor."

The Cossack was occupied in tearing up his costly girdle and rolling a strip into a short sling—an act that filled Yusyski with despair—and from the sling, thrown over his left shoulder, he hung his scabbard and sword, within the ample folds of the sable where it could not be seen.

"Nay, Yusyski," he grinned, "the ermine *svitka* is worth more than all this. You are paid."

But good-nature made the Jew more insistent.

"*Ei-ei*, does not the Cossack know that his enemies are all around the house? If I send for them—"

"I know, Yusyski. Send, if you will! Shout!"

This compliance made the elder instantly suspicious. He gnawed his finger-nails, glancing from the dog to Kirdy and at the row of heads that thrust out from the passage. Tongues clacked in the heads, and Yusyski began to cluck back at his audience, his hands writhing to right and left and grasping at his ear-locks. His people were giving him advice, to fetch the Muscovite soldiery and have the Cossack slain, and Yusyski was cursing them for putting him at the mercy of the Cossack's sword.

"You have robbed me. I shall send for the Muscovites!" he cried, glaring with his one eye at Kirdy.

"Good! I will send some of them to the —— and they will burn me, perhaps, but they will root out your hole, and you will see them playing with your Jewesses."

The wily elder had already come to that conclusion and he saw now that Kirdy was not to be intimidated. Beyond everything Yusyski feared that the soldiers would find the way up to his treasure lofts. Covertly he moved the ermine *svitka* out of sight of his brethren and piled saddle-cloths on it, threatening his followers with untold misery if they disobeyed him.

"Give me your purse, Cossack," he demanded, "and you can go unharmed. Slieb will show you a way."

"First, the razor."

Yusyski prepared to argue the point, but a glance at Kirdy made him scream an order at the ragged individual who had brought the Cossack to the loft. Slieb brought a knife with a sharp edge and a basin of water. Watched intently by eyes that were covetous and at the same time fearful, Kirdy shaved off his scalp-lock and the middle of his mustache. He trimmed the ends carefully and Yusyski, who had heard soldiers preparing to quarter themselves in the lower floors, was inspired to fetch wax. With this Kirdy coaxed his mustache into the thin drooping lines of a Mongol.

His swarthy skin, black hair and eyes all fitted into the part. He passed his hand over the muscles of his face, let his eyelids droop, and, folding his arms in his sleeves, said with the quick inflection of a Mongol:

"*Mai machambi yarou!* Take heed, merchant!"

The Jews crowded nearer to stare and chatter, and even the redoubtable Yusyski blinked. A man of stratagems himself, he could appreciate a trick. Even the sword, as Kirdy happened to know, bore a Mongol inscription, and except for the pile of wet Cossack clothing on the floor and the word of the Jews—which was of doubtful value—a Mongol prince now stood in the attic of the elders. There was Karai, to be sure, who smelled over his master's new attire with interest. But more than one wolfhound was in the steppe, and Kirdy was quite willing to risk keeping him.

"*Ei-ei!*" grunted Yusyski. "It is like magic. But now the noble prince will give the gold and we will swear to keep his secret."

"Not now. Come to me tomorrow at high noon by the tavern gate, and I will give you ten pieces."

"Ten!" Yusyski raised both arms over his head, and snatched back his dirty sleeves to argue.

"Enough!" Kirdy's patience was at an end. Taking out, one after the other, ten gold ducats from the wallet Khlit had given him, he showed them to Yusyski in his palm and a portentous silence fell upon the crowd. "They are yours if you keep silence. Follow me," he added on an afterthought, "or give me away to the soldiers and how many gold pieces will you have? Not one. The Muscovites will pocket them."

Yusyski's one eye blinked rapidly, and he clutched Kirdy's arm, leaping back in fright when Karai rose suddenly from the shadows and snarled silent menace.

"O my God, illustrious sir; not a whisper will pass our lips. But how do we know the glorious knight will keep faith?"

Kirdy kicked up Slieb.

"You know well that a Cossack keeps faith, Jew. Here, animal, lead out of your warren."

Recognizing checkmate, Yusyski abandoned Kirdy and turned on his tribe, spitting and loosing a flood of jargon as he made ready to justify himself and at the same time keep the ermine *svitka* hidden and claim a majority of the ten ducats—a task to which, judging by appearance, he was quite equal, in spite of heavy odds against him.

THE next morning a handsome young Mongol, obviously of rank, breakfasted quietly at the tavern, looking with well-bred curiosity at the pack of officers that filled every available seat.

Here were Polish *litzars* in polished and gold-plated armor and feathered helmets—stalwart Muscovite *boyars* in mail covered with cloth-of-gold trimmed with fur—pale Lithuanians who kept well together and were more than ready to quarrel with any one who got in their way.

In fact more than one quarrel flared up, and swords were grasped angrily. Servants, seeking their masters, elbowed and snarled for precedence. Heydukes in *kaftans* and Persian *khalats* galloped up to the tavern and drained the last liquor from the barrels that had been tapped by their superiors and rolled outside to make room. In the court, within great kettles, roasted the quarters of the cows and steers Kirdy had seen in the cattle-sheds. Carts blocked the streets; peasants, driven from their cottages, stood in frightened groups, while the smoke of camp-fires rose from the plain on every side.

It was a large army, made up of many factions. Tatar patrols rode in from time to time but brought no word of the Cossacks. The snow of last night had covered the tracks of Khlit's squadrons and mystified the *boyare*. Complaints, argument and advice were plentiful, but no one seemed to be in command of this army.

Certainly no one gave Kirdy more than a passing glance. A colonel of one of the Vishnevetski regiments, noticing that the young Mongol's hands were strangely muscular and his face lean for an Eastern prince, took the trouble to question him.

Smilingly Kirdy responded in fluent Manchu-Tatar that he had been journeying from the hordes of Central Asia to see the great *Khaghan* of the Muscovites in his imperial city. His followers and interpreter, he explained, had been lost.

"Probably slain by dog-Cossacks," the colonel muttered and was passing on when Kirdy detained him courteously.

"Is not the emperor of the Muscovites in this *aöul?*"

"Nay. Two days ago he rode north."

"To his imperial city?"

"Aye, to Moscow."

"And are you, O *orda khan,* in command of all these men?"

Visibly flattered, the Polish colonel shook his head.

"Not I. The prince Basmanof was left in command. I have heard that he is taking horse for the north. God only knows what is happening and who is in command."

Kirdy could well believe this. On the highroad he found the baggage sleds of the nobles in a hopeless confusion and the drivers at a wordy war; in the fields only the veteran Polish hussars and the light cavalry of Tatars preserved good order. When he learned beyond doubt that Basmanof had left the army, taking his suite with him, Kirdy was satisfied that the Cossacks were in no danger of pursuit. Their quick march through the village, where the Tsar's army had expected them to bivouac, had saved them.

The Mongol was seen that morning, by certain Jews who had an interest in him, moving here and there among the regiments. A little before noon he bought a horse from a *boyarin* who had lost heavily at dice the night before—a shaggy mustang with a high Muscovite birch saddle. In this he appeared in due course at noon, as he had promised, by the tavern gate, and Yusyski who had been weighing the relative chance of profit in betraying the Cossack, or waiting for the reward, greeted him with profound delight.

"Okh, never for an instant did I doubt the noble lord would keep his promise."

Kirdy, through narrow eyes, stared at him coldly.

"*Mantourami tsai,*" he responded. "I speak naught but Manchu."

Little understanding, but guessing at his meaning, Yusyski wagged his head admiringly and counted the ten gold pieces from one hand to the other, hiding them swiftly in his wallet. Then Kirdy, as he had seen Khlit do the evening before, bent down to shorten still more the stirrup strap—because a Mongol rides almost squatting in the saddle.

"Tell me, Jew," he whispered, "is this in truth the army of Dmitri—the Tsar?"

"Aye," said Yusyski, his eye on the wallet at Kirdy's girdle.

"And this Basmanof, who is he—the commander?"

"Aye," the elder said again, cautiously. "The prince Basmanof was the friend of Boris Godunov. When the *boyare* rebelled against him and the son of Boris Godunov, the prince was swift to join the new Tsar. Many hated him, but the Tsar loves him because he is daring, and can squeeze the last kopek out of us Jews. Now, my Lord, give me another ten ducats!"

Kirdy laughed.

"I swore that you should have ten. No more."

When he rode on, the one eye of Yusyski glared after him as if in some manner the elder of the tribe had been cheated, although in reality he had profited greatly.

Kirdy however was thinking of anything but the Jew. He had seen Khlit accept the baton of a broken and driven army as the honor that it was; and now he had heard of the Tsar and Basmanof leaving this great array, victorious, well fed and equipped—as if a plague had broken out in the village. If the false Tsar was in Moscow he must go thither, but he decided that he would overtake the prince's suite and travel with it.

It was the third day before he came up to the camp of the prince's party, and he was a little surprized to find it out in the open, although settlements were fairly thick hereabouts.

He presented himself before Basmanof—a ruddy man with gray hair, who looked more than a little worried—and told the same story that he had improvised for the Polish colonel. Saying that his servants had been lost, he requested permission to buy a spare horse, rice and tea for himself and fish for the dog. This was granted indifferently and he added to his stock a bearskin, spreading it beside one of the fires of the encampment.

During that night, awakened by Karai's sudden growl, he heard a rider come in from the north and go to the prince.

After breakfast the next morning he heard the Muscovites saying that Basmanof had ordered a horse saddled before dawn and had ridden off with only one servant to make haste to Moscow.

And Kirdy thought there was dire need.

if the prince had left his suite with no more than one equerry to attend him. He was certain of it when he failed to overtake Basmanof on the road, although he kept the saddle for long hours—the prince changing horses at each post station, and sleeping, apparently, not at all.

Yet the placid appearing Mongol made such excellent time that he trotted through the river gate of Moscow at dusk of the afternoon that the erstwhile commander of the army had made his entry.

CHAPTER IV

The whirlwind casts no shadow, and the lightning makes no sound; the viper strikes unseen and the flood sends no herald before it.
AFGHAN PROVERB

NOT by chance did Kirdy arrive at the walls of the imperial city at the hour of evening prayer. He knew that men are prone to be more watchful in broad daylight or deepest darkness than at twilight. And it was vitally important that he should pass the sentries of the outer wall without attracting attention.

A Cossack, attempting to ride into Moscow, would have been cut down or sent to the cells of Uglitch. A Cossack spy, if detected, would have been pulled apart by horses.

Seemingly he did not notice the halberdiers of the watch, but he was both surprized and thankful to observe that they were foreigners who paid no attention to him. For a while he rode through the Kitaigorod or Chinese city, where he would be expected to go. He talked a bit with some Manchu silk merchants, then sought out a small inn where his lack of a retinue would not excite comment. He watched his ponies rubbed down and fed, and wandered forth with Karai at his heels.

He cast only one glance at the crenellated wall of the Kremyl with its bulbed towers and gilded spires. To seek an audience of the false Dmitri was out of all consideration. It was impossible. He had come to slay with his sword the man who had deceived a people into accepting him as Tsar.

Kirdy's only chance was to meet his enemy in the streets. He had heard that the pretended Dmitri rode recklessly from place to place, like a Cossack. So, with infinite patience he set about learning all he could of the new Tsar's habits.

Outwardly, he was a prince of Cathay, amused at the wonders of the imperial city. He stopped to watch the guard change at the palace, and he noticed that the half-company of archers and halberdiers that marched from the barrack gate of the Kremyl was made up of Swedes and Poles—the body-guard, commanded by a French captain.

This officer, brave in ribbons and gigantic boots, was called Jacques Margeret—as Kirdy learned in time by following the guardsmen and listening to the comments of passers-by. He thought, too, that Margeret looked both irritable and feverish. At the barrack the archers and halberdiers were dismissed, and the French captain went hastily to a near-by tavern.

Kirdy resumed his ramble, the richer by one more particular. The foreign soldiery was heartily disliked by the native Muscovites. Perhaps this was because the Tsar allowed only foreigners in his body-guard. It had been very different in the days of Boris Godunov, when the *boyare* thronged the palace.

"He eats veal," grumbled a bearded giant, glaring after the handsome Margeret.

"That is not the worst—the Tsar dines, it is said, without sprinkling the table with holy water."

Others of the group took up the tale—

"He sets bears to chase the priests who would attend him."

The first speaker shook his head sagely.

"*Ekh*, that is sin. Beyond doubt there is a fiend in the Tsar, because of evenings he walks the streets almost alone, going into the shops of Frankish jewelers and such places."

The Mongol prince moved nearer the speakers, as if undecided whether or not to enter the tavern.

"There is no knowing where he goes, Ivan Ilyushka," grumbled another. "He is everywhere, but who sees him? It was not so with his father."

"A-ah! Ivan Grodznoi did not make a jest of holy things—"

The talk veered to the taxing of the monasteries, and the tall Mongol moved away, followed by the great wolfhound. In fact, the doors of the monasteries were closed; the very bells rang out somberly.

If half of Moscow was penned up and

moody, another half was in festival. The night was clear and cold—a full moon soaring above the cloud wrack on the horizon. A company of buffoons and dwarfs passed noisily, bound for the Kremyl, shouting at the solemn, long-robed townspeople. They halted gleefully to warm themselves at a fire. Here a Venetian mountebank had set up a marionette theater, and the familiar images of an old husband and a young wife and Mephistopheles were dancing about on strings, to the edification of the onlookers—until the Italian ducked out from his stall to hold forth his hat and cry the merits of his performance.

The Mongol—this being an excellent place to overhear talk—dropped a coin in the hat and watched gravely when the miniature actors began to dance again on their strings, while a hunchback tortured melody from an ancient fiddle.

Horses entered the narrow street, and when the crowd turned to stare, the sable-clad Mongol glanced sidewise. A party of *boyare* were escorting a sleigh toward the Kremyl, and in the sleigh was nothing but a long casket-like object wrapped in red silk. So solemn the riders, so fantastic the tasseled sleigh with its inanimate burden—the procession seemed to be a ritual of some kind.

By token of the bossed trappings of the horses, and the cloth-of-gold that covered the wooden saddles, the riders were men of rank. The crowd gave back, bowing, to clear the way, and the leaders were preparing to move on, when a merry chiming of bells sounded and a three-horse sleigh entered the far end of the street, rounding the corner at a gallop, in a swirl of snow.

At a cry from the driver the three coal-black Tatar steeds checked and slid to a halt, obedient to the voice rather than to any tug of the reins. The bells jangled and tinkled musically as the horses stood, pawing at the trodden snow, their nostrils steaming. Kirdy eyed them admiringly before he spared a glance for the owner of the flying sleigh.

Then he lifted his head, forgetting for an instant the part he played, the *boyare,* and the horses. A girl was in the sleigh, a white bearskin wrapped around her.

Instead of the silver head-gear of a noblewoman, she wore a fur cap, as dark as the eyes that gleamed with suppressed amusement at the cortège her horses had blocked. She sat erect, her silk sarafan shining upon slim shoulders, and all at once she smiled. So unexpectedly friendly was this smile, the men around Kirdy laughed good-naturedly.

"*Ekh!*" one muttered, "what a splendid beauty—and no one to sit at her side, the *divchina!*"

The leader of the *boyare* motioned at her impatiently.

"Out of the way, wanton!"

The girl's smile vanished, and her cheeks became colorless on the instant. She searched the faces of the riders, as if they were past all understanding. Kirdy knew that Muscovite women of rank were kept as closely secluded as Muhammadan wives, and he suspected that it was unwonted for a young girl to ride through the streets after torchlight.

But the occupant of the sleigh allowed scant time for thought. Springing to her feet, she snatched the whip from the driver's hand and lashed across the face the *boyarin* who had spoken to her. It was a long Cossack *nagaika*, and the flick of it drew blood on the noble's cheek.

"A thousand devils take you!" he roared, drawing back instinctively.

"Go past!" She pointed with the whip, eyes and lips defiant. "Go—*veliki gospodar* —great seigneur, and take your grave thieves with you."

The bearded riders came forward to cluster about the leader and whisper to him. Whether they did not know how to deal with the young woman, or whether they disliked the attention they were attracting, they reined their horses past the sleigh, forcing the crowd still farther back so that their own vehicle could edge by the three blacks.

But the leader, shaking off his companions, trotted back to the sleigh and bent down to peer at the girl with the whip.

"I shall look for you," he said calmly, "tomorrow."

Paying him no further heed, she handed back the whip to the driver, and then glanced with quick interest at Karai. The gaunt wolfhound had come into the street to sniff at the horses' tracks, and approached the sleigh at her call, placing his forepaws on the side of the vehicle. Kirdy strode after him with an exclamation, because the driver had started back and Karai was not tolerant of whips.

"He is more than half wolf!" the girl said.

She rubbed her fingers through the shaggy hair of the borzoi's throat, and though Karai's ears went back instinctively, his tongue lolled out pacifically.

"*O Kitaiski,*" she added, with thoughtful, searching eyes on Kirdy "*vi maslianitsa*—O Cathayan, have you come to the carnival?"

He bowed, to imply ignorance of the Muscovite words, and began to slip the leash of his whip around Karai's throat. Then, to his utter astonishment, the girl in the sleigh spoke in fluent Manchu-Tatar that is the dialect of High Asia.

"O son of white boned fathers, you are far from the land of many rivers and the heavenly mountains. Surely you are an envoy to the court of the *Ak Khaghan.*"

Still stooping over the wolfhound he pondered his reply.

"Daughter of distinction, I have no honor here. In the city of the *Ta-jen* I am no more than a wanderer without servants or friends."

If his ready answer surprized her, she gave no sign of it.

"You wear no sword, O wanderer!"

Sweeping his long arm toward the watching throng, as if to indicate the uselessness of a solitary weapon among so many strangers, he would have withdrawn, but the girl was not yet satisfied.

"Friends! Surely in this place a man has need of friends. Come with me. We shall talk together, you and I—for I am of the *Altyn-juz*, the Golden Horde."

Kirdy regarded her calmly. This girl did not appear to be a Muscovite. And he knew that no European woman would speak the language of the *Altyn-juz* which was the great horde that ruled the pastures of High Asia between Cathay and the farthest posts of Muscovy. Her eyes were dark enough, but her skin much too clear for a native woman—and certainly no woman of the tribes would dare ride alone and whip a *boyarin.*

He had avoided women, because he valued his peace of mind greatly. He assured himself that this must be a girl of the half-world, a spoiled mistress of some lord of the frontier who owned the three horses and the sleigh. It would be better not to accompany her—

"I am Nada," she said gravely, as if she had followed his thoughts. "My house is near the Kremyl wall."

Hitherto, Kirdy had not pondered the matter of a name. It would not do to hesitate in naming himself to this girl, and he did some quick thinking. The garments he wore were those of a prince of the *Altyn-juz*, the Golden Horde. But the girl had just claimed this people for her own. She might possibly know the names of the reigning families—among the nomad chivalry of High Asia the family ties are strict and descent a matter of pride and knowledge of twenty generations. And Kirdy was not apt at lies.

"I am *Ak-Sokol* of the Sha-mo," he said calmly.

He had told the exact truth. He was the White Falcon of the Sandy Desert that was called the Gobi. He did not add that Cossacks and not Mongols had given him this name—the same in both languages. And he had been born in the Gobi.

"From where, in the Sha-mo?" she asked instantly.

Now the Gobi is a vast deal of land, including such things as rolling prairies and burning basins of sand—rivers and barren mountain ranges.

"From the place of shifting sands where the sun rises beyond the Mountains of the Eagles," he responded, again taking refuge in the truth. He knew the Gobi.

Nada's dark eyes gleamed with inward excitement, or amusement. Clapping her hands suddenly, she laughed.

"O White Falcon, you please me. You have said well!"

The laugh itself was mockery and the words hinted at unbelief. Because a Mongol prince is not supposed to endure ridicule, Kirdy saw that a chance was open to him to withdraw. He glanced up and down the street and stepped back, drawing Karai with him and silently cursing the dog's unwillingness to leave the sleigh.

"The way to your house is open, daughter of unwisdom," he assured Nada.

"And you will come—if you are not afraid of me. *Kai*, my lord of the Black Tents, prince of swords—now I know of a surety that you are the envoy sent to this court by my people. On the steppe I heard a tale that you were frozen to death, at the border river. My heart is glad that you live. Why do you take another name? Come, and tell me!"

Kirdy wished that he could read Nada's thoughts, as she seemed able to read his.

Swift reflection gave him little comfort, because he understood that she must have known the envoy who was killed by the bitter cold down the Volga—as Yusyski the Jew had assured him. Now he wore the garments of the dead—who had borne another name.

So he did the simplest thing, and seated himself beside her in the narrow sleigh. The hunchback by the fire took up his fiddle again, and the mountebank the strings of his marionettes. The crowd settled down to watch the play of the miniature actors, and the sleigh sped away while the bells chimed cheerily and Karai, his tongue hanging out on one side, trotted along behind looking every bit as wise and satisfied as Mephistopheles himself.

"I BID you to my bread and salt." Nada, from between the two candles at the table's end, inclined her head to her guest. Kirdy took in his hand the cup offered to him by one of her servitors and bowed—a little stiffly by reason of the heavy sword slung within his fur mantle. Then before drinking he was careful to pour a driblet to the four quarters of the winds, as a Mongol should.

"*Paniha-boumbi*—my thanks to you!"

Well aware that he was being tested—though Nada gave no sign of it—he selected his food frugally. It was as natural that she should offer him refreshment in her house as that he should accept. The tea was seasoned with mutton fat, and he smacked his lips noisily over it; and he grunted loudly when he had eaten meat, to show a Mongol's appreciation of good things.

Meanwhile he took account of his surroundings—a dim hall with almost no furniture save the long table and benches, a roaring fire close at hand, and straw under foot. The wind whistled through cracks in the walls of hewn pine logs, and Kirdy had a curious impression that he was sitting within a forest rather than in a dwelling. The arched ceiling was barely visible and the servitors of the place were certainly tribesmen. He did not think they were slaves.

There were no more than two—gnome-like old men, with hoods on their gray felt coats and horsehide boots on their warped legs. Even their swords were round and short, resembling hunting blades. He knew they came from the wastes of Asia beyond the frontier, and he believed they had served Nada for many years. No other woman was to be seen.

The very smell of the prairies had penetrated this room. Wooden saddles and sleeping-skins were flung against the wall. A hooded peregrine falcon screamed fitfully on its ring. The cups from which he drank were fashioned of birch.

"O my guest," Nada ventured when the last plate was pushed aside, "why did you lie to me?"

Kirdy looked up calmly.

"I have not lied to you."

"Are you really called the White Falcon?"

"Aye, so."

"No man of the Sha-mo ever came to the City of the White Walls before now."

"Then I am the first."

Kirdy turned toward the fire so that he would not look at Nada but could watch the two armed servitors who remained squatting in the shadows.

"O mistress of the house, you said that I was an ambassador. That is not the truth. Since when does a tablet-bearing prince of the Hordes come across the border without a swordsman at his back? I am no more than a wanderer, but in your thoughts—who am I?"

Above all things he wished to leave Nada without suspicion or doubt of him. And he knew by her silence that she was puzzled.

"You wear the garments of a prince of the *Altyn-juz,*" she said, almost to herself.

Kirdy smiled, and took refuge in a parable of the steppes.

"Because a goshawk wears the plumage of a brown eagle, is he an eagle?"

"Nay, but when a hawk soars like an eagle, the quail scatter on the ground. I think you are a spy, and I shall send word to the Tsar's officers to take you."

Not long since Kirdy had dared the Jews to give him up, but he suspected that Nada would dare do anything. She might well be a spy of the Poles and the Poles were in power for the moment. Leaning forward, he held his hands to the fire and made no answer, judging that if she threatened him again she could not be sure of her own mind.

"Have you naught to say, O my guest?"

"This I would say: You spoke of the need of a friend; yet you will make of me an enemy."

From between the candles Nada glanced at him curiously. It was clear to Kirdy that the tribesmen might well have named her so—the Lily. Because her hair, streaming over her shoulders from the narrow pearl-sewn filet on her forehead, was light as ripe straw.

Upon this lightness of loose hair and the fair forehead of the girl the candle flames glowed, flickering when the wind swept the hall in tiny gusts. It was as if the splendid head of Nada were a moon, shedding light into the dim room. When Kirdy looked at her, he was troubled; the skin of his head and shoulders tingled, and words left his lips. In all his life he had not beheld a girl like this.

"Toghrul," she said clearly to one of her followers, "bind me this—foeman. Take him and bind him."

The two tribesmen drew their short hangers and came at Kirdy from either side, the one called Toghrul loosing a coil of woven horsehide at his girdle.

"O *Ak-Sokol,*" he began persuasively, "thou hast heard the command. Hold forth thine arms and be bound."

Kirdy had risen from his bench, and after a swift glance at the youth's face Toghrul wasted no more words but cast a loop of the coil at his head. He saw that their distinguished guest did not intend to let himself be taken. Kirdy slipped aside from the rope and struck the tribesman in the chest, so that Toghrul stumbled and staggered back, barely saving himself from falling into the fire.

Meanwhile Kirdy had wheeled toward the door, only to find the other leaping at him. Again he dodged, but this time the flat of a heavy blade struck him over the ear and he saw red. The dim room swayed, the firelight filled the air and the whisper of the wind became a roar. Ripping open his mantle, he drew his long saber—that had been hidden until now—with a sharp slithering of steel.

He parried the second cut of the agile gnome and locked hilts. A second later the hooked scimitar flashed into the straw and the man caught at his wrist with a groan. Upon the other servitor Kirdy leaped, and held his hand because Nada stood between them, her arms outstretched.

"*Hai-a,* my Cossack!" She cried softly: "The sword reveals the man. So does a Cossack leap and strike."

She came forward to look closely at the blue steel blade with its half-effaced inscription, and a word sent her two followers back into their shadow.

"I thought that you were a Cossack when you came to the sleigh, because you walked with a long stride. And your whip! Here, at the table, I doubted; but now there is no doubt. Can you use a sword?"

Without replying, Kirdy slipped the weapon back in its scabbard, which he held ready for use.

"You can!" Nada's lips trembled in a smile. "I prayed to the holy angels that they would send me a sword. I will not give you up to the Muscovites, but you must serve me."

"O *divchina,* I am neither spy not servitor. As you say, I am of the Siech, free-born. I came to the city of the White Walls to slay a traitor. An oath has been sworn."

For a moment she pondered.

"And when you have slain this man? *Kai,* that is like a young warrior of the south—to follow a feud blindly, like a falcon that takes no notice of anything except its quarry."

"Then I go upon the snow road again, to the south."

Nada drew a bench to the fire and seated herself, leaning chin on hand, frowning a little.

"You said you came from the Sha-mo! I know it is true—you have no skill at lying."

"Aye, so. My grandmother on my mother's side was a princess of the Yakka Mongols, of the line of Genghis Khan. There was I born. But now I go to the Cossack Siech."

"Then you will need wings, O White Falcon. Because at midnight the city gates were closed, and now are guarded. None is suffered to pass out. So my men tell me."

Kirdy nodded without excitement. He never bothered his head about future difficulties, and he only wondered whether he could trust Nada to keep his secret.

"We have shared bread and salt," she said as if answering his thought. "We are people of the steppe and this is not our place. I do not know if we will pass again, alive, through the gates." Her eyes, wide and brooding, were bent on the fire. "O White Falcon, have you ever felt the storm wind rising, far off, on the plains, when the black clouds mount up against the sun and the cattle become mad with fear? *Kai,* that has come upon me."

A breath of cold air stirred and one of the candles went out, and Nada, glancing over her shoulder, gave a soft exclamation of dismay. Her hand went to her throat and for the first time Kirdy saw that she wore a miniature ikon, bearing a beautifully painted picture of an old man leaning on a wooden staff beside a wolf. He searched his memory and knew this for Saint Ulass, of the wolves.

"A trap is set!" Nada began again, slowly as if trying to see into the future. "For whom, for what? Toghrul, come here!"

The old tribesman came and squatted in the straw at her feet, like a dog.

"Didst thou see, Toghrul, the horses snort and rear when the *boyars* and their sleigh drew nigh us? Was that a sign?"

"Aye, Nada, they were afraid."

"But why?"

The lined face of the servitor puckered.

"Why not? There was a smell of the dead, of graves. It came from the sleigh."

"The casket in the red cloth was not a coffin—surely it was too small."

"I know not. The horses snorted and would have broken away had I not spoken to them."

"What else hast thou to say?"

"There is a *yang, yang seme*—a ringing of the bells. Even now it began and the end is not yet."

"Nay, this is a festival night."

Toghrul considered and shook his head, speaking out with the boldness of one who knew his words were not idle.

"Not a *tamasha*, this! The *Ta-jen* with the little gods and the fiddle was merry in the street, yet the voice of the bells is otherwise. It is a voice raised to drive a devil away in the night, or to mourn because of bloodshed."

"I would have left the city, White Falcon, but the gates are shut and the order against leaving has gone forth. Is it not a trap? My fear is for you. If an oath has been sworn, you will not ride from Moscow until a man has died—but what if the trap is set for you?"

Her dark eyes were troubled, and Kirdy felt that she was indeed afraid. These three souls from the steppes were restless and alert, as he was. Intent on his purpose, he had no misgivings and he did not think any one but Nada knew that he was a Cossack.

"Go to the captain of the Franks, the man called Margeret," she cried. "I have talked with him, and he is a warrior who holds honor dear. Go to him and ask a written paper that will let me pass through the gates with three men."

Kirdy smiled.

"If the Tsar has forbidden—"

"Who knows what the Tsar has said? Margeret commands the first company of the bodyguards. His men are Franks, and they will obey an order from him. Go at once—O slay whom you will—break your sword and be cut down, if you will. Serve me only in this one thing, by the salt we have shared—"

Seeing him thoughtful and unmoved, Nada stamped a slender booted foot angrily.

"Fool! You will not forgive me because I played with you. But you will play the Cossack, and will ride on and draw your sword and strike until the life is cut out of you. Then you will be no more than a marionette that is tossed from the theater. Abide by the oath, my wooden warrior, but bring me my paper, before the dawn."

CHAPTER V

THE BLACK HOUR

ALONE once more in the moonlit street, Kirdy reflected that he had been outwitted by the girl Nada. She had drawn his secret from him, had kept Karai with her—and might betray him to the very officer he was seeking. Nevertheless, he decided to go to Margeret. The captain of the imperial bodyguard would know better than any one else the movements of the false Dmitri—might even be called upon to attend the impostor. And Nada's request would give him an excuse for arousing the officer at this hour of early morning.

He kept to the deep shadow in the narrow streets, with ears alert for the tread and clatter of the watch. He heard nothing except a flurry of hoofs when riders galloped through an adjoining alley, and a man laughed recklessly. Turning quickly he beheld three black horses speeding through a lane of gleaming snow and the fluttering cloaks of men riding like fiends.

All the while the discordant tocsin of the bells rang out overhead, as if the great towers were calling to the graves to give up their dead.

Sleepy Muscovites stared at him in the tap-room of the tavern, and he was directed to an upper chamber where the deep voice of the French captain was unmistakable enough. A Muscovite servant opened the door, candle in hand, and Kirdy sniffed at strangling fumes of charcoal. A brazier stood near the disordered bed upon which Margeret sat in shirt and trousers, his ruddy face blotched and gleaming with sweat.

At first Kirdy thought he was drunk. Margeret cursed steadily, shifting from one language to another as the impulse took him and paying no attention at all to his guest.

"He is sick," the servant observed tranquilly, "in the belly."

The Frenchman shivered and his teeth clicked spasmodically. Racked by chills and the heat of fever he straddled his bed and shouted for the sword that the servant would not give him.

"*Clops de vorenne—chort-korm!*" he bellowed at his man.

"What is he saying?" Kirdy asked.

The serf yawned and listened irritably. "*Kholops dvoriani,*" he muttered thoughtfully. "Aye—he says: '—— the dog of a *boyarin* and his ——'s food!' Well, my master has been near to giving up his soul. The pains racked him when he came in. Then he grew worse all at once. That was how it was, your Excellency!"

"He'll die, right enough, in these fumes." The smoldering charcoal made Kirdy's head swim. "Carry the coals outside and build a fire."

The servant blinked bleared eyes and considered the matter at length.

"Why does your honor trouble about all that? If God sends my master death—no help for it. Besides, he appears to be stronger, now."

Kirdy's answer was to thrust his fist through the glazed paper window and kick "Clops" heartily. In his present state the foreign captain was incapable of signing any order at all; and the Cossack did not propose to watch him strangle in the foul air. So he forced Margeret to lie prone and covered him with all the quilts and skins in the chamber.

Grumbling, Clops brought wood and kindled a clean blaze on the hearth, eying askance the tall stranger who looked like a nobleman from Cathay and paced the chamber angrily. Margeret ceased swearing and began to breathe more regularly. By the time the first gray light had crept upon the white roofs he displayed an interest in his visitor.

"He asks," explained the servant, stumbling out of a doze, "what your honor does in his room."

Kirdy explained carefully what he sought from the captain, and the shaggy Muscovite interpreted in the strange jargon that master and man had hit upon for mutual intercourse.

"He says your honor is mistaken. There was no order to close the gates. You can ride forth with your *divchina* at any hour."

"Look!" Kirdy hauled Clops to the broken window and pointed through it. The tavern was near the end of a street opening upon a drill ground and one of the gates of the Kremyl wall was visible, a knot of halberdiers clustered before it. The gate was shut, beyond a doubt.

Clops blinked and scratched his head.

"Well, that is how it is. But it doesn't matter. If my master says you can go through, no one will stop you."

"Devil take the fellow!" Kirdy thought, and added aloud. "The lady must leave Moscow without delay; she has a quarrel with a *boyarin*, and is afraid. She must have an order from your master. It has nothing to do with me, but I promised to bear her the order."

Margeret evidently knew her, because he smiled and nodded.

"Nada—a pretty lass. She watched me drill the pikemen by the Archangel. Nay, my Lord, when I can stand I will do myself the honor of escorting her."

The closing of the gates seemed to puzzle him, but he dismissed it with a shrug, the fever still burning in his veins. Then he glanced at Kirdy, one eyebrow raised.

Near at hand had sounded the clang and slither of steel in conflict—unmistakable to either Cossack or Frenchman. Voices were raised in sudden tumult. The street below was still in deep shadow and Kirdy was trying to make out the nature of the fighting when he heard hurried steps on the stairs.

An elderly man, with shrewd, pinched features stepped into the room, hugging a black velvet mantle around his thin body. When he saw Margeret he looked relieved—took a bit of snuff with a flourish and stared curiously at the young warrior garbed as a Mongol.

Margeret addressed him rapidly in French, and waved his hand from the newcomer to Kirdy.

"M'sieur Cathayan, this is the good M'sieur Bertrand from Kassa—a merchant by trade, a philosopher from choice. I have not the advantage of knowing your name—"

"The White Falcon." Kirdy smiled.

"Ah, Bertrand, this White Falcon—whatever he may be—has, I believe, ministered to me in good case. But what brings you here at this infernal cockcrow?"

"Listen!" The merchant held up his hand.

Kirdy, already at the window, saw a troop of horsemen spurring into the street in pursuit of two human beings, half clad and wailing, a man and woman. The leading riders came up with the man, who turned with drawn sword. A pass or two of the weapons and the fugitive went down silently with his skull split open. The woman screamed, and Kirdy swore under his breath.

She had been ridden down by the horses, and one of the soldiers, leaning from the saddle as he passed, drove his saber through her body.

"*Nom d'un nom!*" the merchant whispered, at his side.

"But what has happened, Bertrand?" demanded Margeret, trying to get out from under the covers.

The merchant took snuff again, glanced over the rose-tinted roofs and the gilded spires at the red glow in the east.

"Ah," he said, and considered, "the festival of mirth has ended, the carnival of death begun, *mon vieux!*" To Kirdy he added, shaking his thin head, "The Tsar and Basmanof have been slain in one of the galleries of the Kremyl."

CHAPTER VI

When the trail is clear the horse will follow it, even in darkness. If the trail be hidden, the dog will smell it out. But when the trail is at an end horse and dog look to their master, the man.

MONSIEUR BERTRAND was a mild soul and a daring trader. He bought in Moscow damask stuffs, silks and red leather, paid for them in silver and took his chances of robbery and shipwreck with all the equanimity of the philosopher that Margeret had named him. Having traveled for some years along the rivers of Muscovy, he spoke the language well, and a knew a deal of the half-oriental and wholly—to his thinking—barbaric court of the Tsar. While Kirdy listened intently and the sick captain swore, he unfolded the tale of the Kremyl.

"It has been, messieurs, a night of more bloodshed than judgment. Only yesterday I met the unfortunate Dmitri in all health and hardihood upon the steps of the *Kasna*—that is how they call their treasury. He was at the head of some followers who were bearing forth certain jewels and monies.

"A merchant at court must have his ear sharpened, to catch intrigue. For weeks I have perceived a conspiracy against the Tsar—" the worthy Bertrand pronounced it "Zar"—"and Dmitri must have been drunk as a trooper if he knew nothing of it. Some of the older princes and one Michael Tatikof lead the conspirators. Dmitri drank deep and laughed and feasted his eyes on jewels and fine horses. Good!

"Late in the evening this Tatikof, who had been from the city for several days, appeared at the head of a company of *boyare*. They concealed among their horses a sleigh. Upon this sleigh rested a casket. And, messieurs, if you were to think for a thousand days you would never hit upon the meaning of that casket."

With a half smile on his thin lips, he paused to glance at the two listeners—he spoke in French, translating rapidly for Kirdy's benefit when he noticed the youth's eager interest.

"It was the coffin of the *real* Dmitri, the son of Ivan the Terrible. In the coffin reposed the body of the child, dressed as when he had been murdered—even a toy in his skeleton hand. *C'est incroyable, mais c'est—la Russe!* Unbelievable, but—this is Russia. Tatikof and others had suspected for some time that Dmitri was an impostor; but in what way could they prove their suspicions? Dmitri, the false Dmitri, had shown a jeweled cross; he had been acknowledged by the empress-mother; moreover he had the army behind him—"

The Frenchman shrugged one shoulder toward Margeret, and, with a tentative glance at Kirdy, went on:

"Tatikof exhibited the body of the boy to the elder princes, while the false Dmitri was reveling in the palace. The dead lay in judgment upon the living.

"Good! It was decided to slay the false Tsar. You see, messieurs, it is an easier matter to prove a dead man an impostor than a living man a fraud. And the army, except for the palace guards and the Moscow *strelsui* or militia, was in the steppes chasing some Cossacks. A fool's mission.

"And Dmitri died like the reckless fool he was. Sound asleep. His gossip Basmanof was awake. Tatikof stabbed Basmanof in a gallery leading to the quarters of the Tsar. Then the *boyare* entered the sleeping chamber of the false Dmitri, and now the impostor lies dead—"

"Name of a dog!" shouted the captain. "Dmitri, I do not believe he was a pretender!"

"My dear captain, he was a consummate and daring liar. In all the world, where will you find such another? Saint Denis—he had himself proclaimed emperor, and took a wife of the blood from Poland!"

"But, do you believe the conspirators, with their skeleton?"

Bertrand glanced at Kirdy covertly and took snuff.

"My dear Margeret," he said under his breath in French, "what the —— do you or I know? I believe the Muscovite princes because they have the upper hand."

"We took oath to—"

"Be loyal to this Dmitri? Eh, well, he is now dead. I can admire his spirit, but I condemn his lack of wisdom. If he had not made a mock of the churches and said his prayers to a ribald mask he would not have made enemies of the stiff old *boyare*. He gave his soul to the devil for a stake to gamble with."

Margeret, who had been tearing the coverlet between strong fingers, shook his head impatiently.

"But the palace guard!"

"Some of your sheep-headed archers were cut down. Be grateful, my friend, that you were not on duty. Saint Denis! I believe your dinner was tampered with!"

"The militia—"

"Slept and snored, but now has been won over by the *boyare*. It guards the gates and scratches its thick head. Meanwhile the *boyare* are hunting down the followers of the false Dmitri."

Going to the window, he gazed with some curiosity at bodies of halberdiers and mounted nobles passing through the square at the end of the street. Smoke was rising from different points in the city, and veiling the clear light of early morning.

"I must go," he said thoughtfully, "to pay my respects to the victors, at the palace."

"And I," Margeret muttered, "to my men."

"Impossible! Your ailment is providential. Even if you could stand, you were better between the sheets. Margeret, you are an excellent soldier but an execrable diplomat."

"God's thunder! If my archers are to be put to the point of the sword—"

"Content you! I saw them penned in barracks. The *boyare* know the worth of your fire-eaters. Lie *perdu* until I can bring you fresh news."

Weakness rather than conviction forced Margeret to stretch himself on the bed again; but when Bertrand bowed and moved to the door Kirdy stepped to his side.

"Merchant, take me with you!"

Bertrand tapped his snuff-box reflectively and pursed his lips.

"Ah, my *nez Kitaisqui*,* worthy people will avoid the streets this day. Why would you come?"

Kirdy swept his arm toward the rising sun.

"Thence rode I to set eyes on the great lord of the Muscovites. If I may not behold him in life, I would see him in death."

After a second glance at the placid-appearing Mongol, the Frenchman bowed assent, rather grudgingly. He was a judge of character and he discovered in Kirdy's eyes a certain smoldering eagerness that puzzled him.

THE two took their way over the trampled snow, seeing much and saying little, each occupied with his own thoughts.

Kirdy reflected that a passport written and signed by the Captain Margeret would be worse than useless, now, to Nada. He wasted no time in surprize over the end of the false Dmitri; it had happened and now he meant to see for himself the body of the impostor, so that he could say to the Cossacks without any shadow of doubt that the traitor who had cost the lives of thousands of the brothers was dead.

So thinking, he paid little heed to the bodies that lay in the narrow streets. At times they passed by a house that was beset by *strelsui* and nobles. Then Bertrand hung back and would have fetched a circle to avoid the armed men, but Kirdy pushed through the mob, saying that nothing was to be gained by slinking like dogs. In fact, the soldiery, seeing his erect head and imperious manner, often cleared a way for him and the Frankish merchant.

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* Kniaz Kitaisky—Cathayan prince.

"Eh, it is terrible," Bertrand sighed, watched men run into a door under upflung shields, while arrows flickered down from narrow windows. "It is a massacre of the Poles."

There was real regret behind his sigh, because the shrewd trader foresaw that this slaughter of the visitors would be ample excuse for the ambitious and powerful King Sigismund to lead his armies into Muscovy, and that a great war would follow on the heels of civil conflict—with more plundering than profit for himself.*

The more they penetrated the noisy streets the less they were able to learn of events.

An officer of the town watch glared at them suspiciously, taking them for Poles or Jews in disguise, and was utterly astonished when they told him the Tsar was dead.

"*Okh*—who would give orders if not our great illustrious prince? How can he be dead? There was an order given to cut down all who are not orthodox believers—"

Pulling at Kirdy's arm, Bertrand hurried on, only to be stopped by a drunken halberdier who presented his pike, and roared drowsily:

"Stand—enemies of the faith! Put down your weapons and bend the head!"

Him Kirdy quieted with a gold piece and passed on before the slow-thinking warrior reflected that more plunder might be had where the ducat came from. They saw a whole colony of Jews scurrying like hares into a dark alley where a barricade was being put up—a flimsy rampart of tables, benches and posts.

"It is a dark hour, my Lords!" a blind beggar declaimed, shaking his shaggy head. "*Ai-a*, who knows what word is true, and what is false? A priest said we had a new Tsar—long life and glory to him. Give a copper for bread, my Lords!"

"The belly endures no interregnum," murmured Bertrand. "Ah, here is a client who knows me."

He accosted a bearded noble who was forcing his way on horseback toward one of the Kremyl gates, followed by a wild-looking array of fur-clad slaves and men-at-arms. The Muscovite knew nothing at all of events, save that he had been summoned to attendance by the *doumnii boyare*, the councilors. But he allowed Kirdy and the merchant to pass through the palace gate with him, and that was something gained.

Here there was less fighting, but little more enlightenment. Kirdy saw a young woman with painted cheeks and mincing step—a being in voluminous velvets and silk garments, who yet looked at him out of haggard eyes, led away between two files of guardsmen. With her were two elder men who walked proudly and held hat and gloves as precisely as if they were bound for a court audience instead of gaol.

"The bride of the false Dmitri," Bertrand whispered. "The princess of Sandomir. A pawn, thrust in advance of king and bishops."

"She does not weep," Kirdy commented, with approval.

The way into the Tsar's quarters was barred to them, and they learned that the *boyare* were in council. It was a dwarf of the troupe of buffoons who told them where the false Dmitri lay—a jester of the company Kirdy had seen the night before.

"Nay, Uncle," the little man laughed, "which Dmitri doth your soberness seek? The skeleton or the corpse?"

"What difference?" retorted the merchant with a grimace.

"By the holy angels, a mighty difference! One, that was no more than a fistful of bones yester-eve—that a starved jackal would turn from—now is an honorable relic, and worketh miracles by account of the priests. The other, that was our celestial prince but a day agone, is now accursed cold meat that an honest butcher would spit upon—"

"Where lies he—this false Dmitri?" asked Kirdy.

"*Ohai*—he lies for all to see. Come, Uncle Merchant, come my Lord of Tatary! I will show you! Permit me to conduct you to the royal seat. He lies in state."

Grimacing, the dwarf pushed and mumbled his way through the crowds, beckoning over his shoulder to the two, until he came to a dense throng where elbows and fists were needed to clear a way. This was in front of a dark pile of stone, a silent monastery, where Bertrand informed Kirdy, the empress-mother had taken refuge.

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* Bertrand's forebodings were more than justified; while the *boyare* fought against the mob in succeeding years, Sigismund invaded Moscow and entered the Kremyl. These years of famine and despair became known as the "time of trouble."

Here on a table lay two bodies stripped of all clothing.

The one on top, with its feet resting upon the chest of the other, was that of Basmanof. Kirdy recognized the harsh, lined features of the noble who had betrayed one master and had died in defense of the false Dmitri. He pushed closer to the table to look at the body of the impostor.

He saw a powerful figure, terribly gashed about the chest, and he caught his breath suddenly, while the dwarf chuckled.

"*Ohai*, my Lord of Tatary—we have fitted him for his journey to the land of Satan."

Kirdy beheld upon the head of the dead man, a mask. It was grotesque and evil, with the ears of an animal, the grin of a satyr and the mouth of a monster. Through the holes of the mask the dead eyes stared up at the gray sky.

"Holy Mother," whispered Bertrand, "what mockery!"

The assassins had taken down the mask found in Dmitri's chamber and had placed it upon the man who had made a jest of the sacred pictures.

The men of the crowd, emotionless as so many statues, looked from the bodies on the table to the young Mongol, who pushed steadily closer to the head in the mask. A murmur went up as he stretched out his hand.

"Name of a name," the merchant cried, "do not touch it!"

But Kirdy had lifted the heavy painted lacquer countenance and was studying the pallid features beneath—the strong features of a youth no older than himself, without a beard. A knife had slashed open the right cheek near the nose.

"Is this your Tsar?" he asked Bertrand.

"Aye, that is Dmitri," the merchant nodded, and crossed himself. He started to say something more, but changed his mind and motioned to Kirdy to come away.

Kirdy replaced the mask, folded his arms in his sleeves, and withdrew through the crowd that opened to let him pass. The dwarf lingered with his fellows and the two visitors walked slowly from the Kremyl grounds. Bertrand was chewing his lip and frowning, and when they were alone in a narrow alley, spoke to Kirdy abruptly.

"Why did you lift the mask?"

"To see the face," the young warrior made answer simply. "Men told me that the Khaghan of the Muscovites had a mole or wart on the cheek near the nose. I did not see it."

Several times Bertrand's lips moved before he found words that satisfied him.

"You have more boldness than discretion, my friend! A mole! It must have been slashed away. The cheek was cut."

"*Aya tak*," Kirdy nodded, "aye so. It is an evil fate, that of the emperor of this people."

The Frenchman shrugged.

"Savages! Worse will follow, I fear."

Through Kirdy's mind the cry of the jester rang like an echo:

"*His long journey to the lands of Satan.*" Aloud, he added to his companion. "Now I must sleep!"

For two days and a night he had not closed his eyes, and for many days he had not taken more than a remnant of rest; he was a little bewildered by the fighting in the city, and the crowds from which he could not escape. He wanted to be alone, to think about what had happened. But he attended the older man to Bertrand's house near the tavern, and the Frenchman looked after him thoughtfully when he strode away.

Weary as he was, Kirdy was careful to lead his horses from their stable where plunderers might find them and take them with him when he sought Nada's dwelling to report his lack of success in getting the passport and to tell the girl all that had taken place during the night.

He found the house guarded by Toghrul and Karai, and learned that Nada had gone out on foot to investigate matters with her other men. Kirdy gave the tribesman a message for his mistress and Toghrul prepared a bed for him in a corner of the dining-hall—a bed of straw, with a saddle for pillow.

Almost at once Kirdy fell into a deep sleep, rousing a little when he heard voices. One of the voices sounded like Nada's, and he fancied that she was giving orders. A light footfall stirred the straw near his head, and he was aware of a scent that seemed to come from the open steppe—of flowers warmed by the sun.

CHAPTER VII

THE REFLECTIONS OF MONSIEUR BERTRAND

MOGHRUL'S almost soundless tread roused Kirdy, and he grasped at his sword hilt before he saw the old man squatting near him, waiting to be noticed.

"The *khanum* says to thee, O Kazak," the servitor began at once, "it is better to lie hidden than to walk in the eyes of men. It is much better to wait than to seek recklessly. So wilt thou abide her coming. The horses are fed."

"Has she gone forth again?" Kirdy was disappointed and a little vexed, though he did not show it.

"Aye."

"There is fighting. I must talk with her."

"When she wills."

"She is safer behind walls." Kirdy thought of the *boyarin* who had been lashed by her whip, a certain Tatikof who had promised to seek her out.

Toghrul pondered, and made response gravely.

"When the end appointed by the unalterable decree has come, life is then lost, and for all there is an end ordained. What avail, to go thither or sit here? She will not be harmed, now!"

"How long have I slept?"

"The sun was sinking, O Kazak—night came and now the sun has risen."

With an exclamation the young warrior sprang to his feet. He had slept for eighteen hours, and there was much to be done. After plunging his head and hands in a basin of cold water brought by Toghrul, he made a hasty meal of mutton and wine, and learned that Nada intended to ride from Moscow that night. The guards, it seemed, had been removed from the gates, to deal with a conflagration that had broken out at the other end of the city.

"See to the horses, Toghrul. There will be looting."

"Aye. The *khanum* has said that thou wilt ride forth with us."

And all at once it seemed to Kirdy that nothing in the world could be finer than to ride with Nada and her men of the steppe. Whither? What matter? He was restless and uneasy here in the city, like an unbroken colt penned in with strange horses.

"I can not do that," he said slowly.

Toghrul did not seem convinced.

"*Allah khanum yok—khanum Allah bir tzee,*" he muttered cryptically. "Allah said no to the woman—the woman said yes to Allah."

"What words are these?"

"O Kazak, I said I shall water the horses and groom them, against thy need, this night."

Still afoot, still alone—he had left Karaj, perforce—and still deep in moody reflection, Kirdy fared forth into the mud and the snow and the anger of the streets. He went first to the imperial stables behind the Terem, looking for all the world like a Cathayan noble with an interest in fine horse-flesh. So acute was his curiosity that he asked if all the emperor's beasts were in the stalls. As he did not stint gold pieces, he learned at length that the illustrious Tatikof had led out a half dozen Arab-breds, and that three Turkish racers had been missing since the night before last.

This matter he pondered, remembering the riders he had seen when the moon was setting that same night.

From the stables he made his way leisurely toward Bertrand's quarters and discovered that the worthy merchant was not at home. Upon this, he sought out Margeret's tavern, but contented himself with a table in the tap-room instead of seeking out the sick captain. Here he sat, apparently lost in the contemplation of the intelligent Asiatic, sipping wine occasionally, until the afternoon wore on and Bertrand did not appear. He climbed the stairs and passed an hour listening to Margeret's roared-out comments on the madness that had seized the *boyare.*

At the end of the hour he had what he desired—a more or less detailed account of the false Dmitri's daily routine, habits, and especially his manner of exercising his horses.

He had taken his leave, ceremoniously, of the captain, when he ran into Bertrand at the foot of the stairs. The merchant coughed, bowed, and would have passed on up, but Kirdy put a hand on his arm.

"Good sir, you think I am not—a Cathayan. Perhaps you are right. Will you honor me by sitting at table with me? They serve a Wallachian wine that is light and healthful."

Bertrand drew back into the shadow and tried to gaze into the lowered eyes of the young warrior.

"A plague on't! What are you?"

"A seeker, who will bring no harm to you."

"I think—"

But Bertrand kept his thought to himself, and decided to accompany the Mongol noble. They faced each other over cups of spiced white wine, and the merchant waited for Kirdy to speak. He waited until his patience yielded to his fears.

"What master do you serve? Are you Tatikof's spy?"

Kirdy smiled.

"Let me tell you a story. Once there lived a sultan who was a very fox for wiles. He was called Motavakel Shah, and he summoned his enemy to his house, thinking to teach him fear. A lion—one of his beasts—was let loose into the room by his servants. Though the lion ran past the table, the guest of Motavakel did not rise from his cushions nor utter a word. Then snakes were turned into the room, coiling past the feet of the host and the guest. Still the foe of Motavakel did not raise his feet or his voice. A dish was placed before him and under the cover of the dish were scorpions.

" 'Nay,' said the guest of Motavakel, 'this is a night not of the lion, or the serpents, or the scorpions, but of the sword!' And with the blade at his girdle he slew Motavakel and fled unhurt."

"Ah, a parable. Is your sword, then, hidden?"

"Good sir," Kirdy said quietly, "it is not you I seek. But the time for trickery is past, the moment of the sword is nigh. Answer then, swiftly, remembering that what I seek from you is—truth! When you saw the body that lay under the mask, yesterday, you were troubled by doubt."

"And you!"

"I also. The one mark that marked Dmitri beyond doubt—the wart was gone. It might have been slashed away. But when a trail is hidden, a man has fled—who shuns pursuit."

Bertrand leaned forward breathing quickly, his eyes probing Kirdy's.

"The false Dmitri has fled?"

"Leaving another body to hide his trail." Kirdy turned the porcelain cup slowly in his lean hand. "Perhaps. Every soul in the palace would have looked for the wart upon the face of the dead man. It was gone, and the slash was covered by the mask."

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* No Muscovite reasoned thus! What man are you?"

"One who has tracked beasts. Man is not otherwise. Tell me first why you doubted that the body was Dmitri's—the false Dmitri's?"

Bertrand glanced to one side, then the other.

"A little matter," he whispered. "Two, I should say. I saw his Illus—the impostor the day before. Eh, well. I noticed the cut of his hair, being exact in such conceits of dress. The hair on the body seemed to be longer than Dmitri's."

Kirdy nodded silently.

"Good!" The shrewd merchant warmed to his contention. "The late Tsar shaved his chin. The body, also, was shaved, but the hair on the chin was soft and ill-cut—as if, pardie, this man had worn a beard until it was cut off hastily, to make him resemble some one else."

"Then, Uncle Merchant, was there a man in this court who looked like the false Dmitri?"

Bertrand chewed his lips reflectively.

"Aye, so. One Stanislav Bouthinski, a Pole. A secretary, I believe, to the ambassadors of that country."

"*Hai!*" Kirdy's dark eyes gleamed, as if he had hit upon the slot of a stag. "You, my good sir, are no Muscovite. You have lived at other, and wiser, courts."

The touch of flattery warmed the Frenchman, who said again that the Muscovites were savages.

"Bouthinski is missing. Today I searched for him, and his people told me he must have fallen in the massacre. Many hundred Poles have been cut down, and trampled into the mud."

A new doubt struck him.

"But what of all this? Grant that the false Dmitri may have fled, leaving another body already slain in his bed. Grant that this body is Bouthinski's—naked as a peeled turnip and slashed on the cheek. None the less, Dmitri is now approved false, and a pretender. How could he escape—"

"Three fine horses were missing from the stables that night. Three riders passed through the guards—and who could win out of the gates save this man who called himself the Tsar?"

"It is possible."

"Aye, so. Men say that this false Dmitri was shrewd as a fox. Surely he had scent of the conspiracy against him. He left the army, and summoned Basmanof after him.

Then, leaving this body of his friend in his bed, he went from Moscow. Whither?"

Bertrand shrugged and felt for his snuff-box.

"Not to the Poles, I'll wager." He laughed grimly. "*Peste!* What a fellow! Destruction to all he touches!"

"He would not flee to the Cossacks. He had betrayed them."

The merchant, who knew the courts of Europe, and the Cossack, who had fought under the monarchs of Asia, measured each other with understanding eyes. Kirdy took time to think over all that had been said, because he wished to have it firmly in his mind in order to decide what to do next. Bertrand mused along a different line.

"St. Denis! I heard a rumor that the bride of the impostor did not seem to be dying of grief. It may be that she knows he is alive."

"I have heard that woman's tears are soon dried."

"Well, pardon me, but I have discovered otherwise, my friend. However, it is clear that the young —— has not taken his bride with him, if indeed he lives."

"Could he win a following from the army in the south?"

The merchant shook his head and took snuff, wiping the brown grains from his coat carefully.

"After the massacre in Moscow the Polish regiments will turn on the Muscovites, and when the dog fight begins, the Tatars will plunder both. It is true that Sigismund's regiments—and they are many—were sent hither to support this Dmitri. But when the time came to draw the sword he abandoned the army and fled like a jade-robbing knave from the city. Even so—such is the charm of his presence—the Muscovite cavalry might have been won to his cause, but he mocked the traditions of these stiff-collars. He put an actor's mask on the ikon stand. So now they say he has sold himself to Satan."

Bertrand smiled, contemplating the savagery of these pagans, as he chose to call them.

"But where are you going?"

Kirdy drew tighter his girdle and glanced out into the gathering dusk.

"Perhaps this dog-soul is dead; perhaps not. But if he lives, he must have taken refuge in the steppes. He has good horses, and I go to follow while the trail is fresh."

Leaving the worthy merchant utterly astonished, Kirdy hastened from the tavern and was turning into the open square where the great bell hung upon its stone dais, when he beheld torches moving in the same direction.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIVER GATE

SEVERAL riders, accompanied by a score of men-at-arms and link bearers, were entering the street where Nada's house stood, driving some captives with arms bound before them. Hastening his pace, Kirdy drew closer and recognized the bearded Tatikof among the horsemen.

He passed behind the cavalcade, skirted the edge of the square to the mouth of an alley that led to Nada's stables. Then he ran as if a thousand fiends were at his heels. In the snow the footing was bad, and more than one log or wagon wheel made him plunge before he came out at the sheds and saw that they were empty. Nada's sleigh, too, was not to be seen.

A half-squad of Swedish halberdiers were standing talking by the gate-posts at the street end, evidently waiting for Tatikof and the company. Kirdy leaped to the rear steps of the house, and pushed at the door. It was fastened—barred by the feel of it. He thrust his fist through the tallow paper of the nearest window and called softly.

Karai's delighted bark answered him.

He was half through the window when a figure appeared out of the darkness and he recognized Toghrul's broad face.

"The *khanum* must leave the house by this way," he said quickly. "The Muscovites come for no good. Where are the horses?"

"Allah!" grunted the tribesmen. "I saw the warriors with long spears, and I sent Karabek with the five horses and the sleigh away at once."

"To the *khanum?* Where is she?"

"I do not know. Karabek says she is buying clothes at the Jews' bazaar. He will tell her of the coming of the Muscovites when he finds her—"

A warning hiss from the old man made Kirdy aware of footsteps approaching the side of the house, and he hauled himself through the window without waiting to see who they might be. They proved to be the halberdiers, with one of the *boyare* and a lantern. And they stationed themselves where they could watch both the house and the sheds.

"How many are with thee, Toghrul?"

"One, and the dog."

"Fool! The way was open to flee!"

"Nay, the house is in my charge. What do I know of these Urusses? Go thou and talk with them, for they beat at the door."

There was no escape by the rear now, and Kirdy saw that some men with firelocks and lighted matches were outside the only other window on the lower floor. The openings above were no more than slits, to let in light and air. The log houses of Moscow had been built to keep out thieves and the cold.

Listening at the front door, he made out Tatikof's deep voice.

"Within there! I bear an order from the council. The lady Nada must go with me. Open!"

"The forehead to you, great Lord! What seek you of Nada?"

"An order is to be obeyed. Open!"

"She is not here."

A moment of silence, and then Tatikof laughed.

"She was seen to go in, and only a Cossack has come out since. What man are you?"

Kirdy did not answer at once. Nada had no Cossack among her servants; Tatikof's spies might have penetrated his disguise—but surely the servitors had been in and out since he left.

"*Nichevo*—no matter!" he responded cheerfully. "I have no quarrel with you, Tatikof, nor you with me, yet I swear to you one thing: If your men break into this house many will go to bed in their graves."

"And we will pull you out by the hair!" the *boyarin* roared.

"Once you were whipped, but now you want a taste of the sword."

An ax thudded into the stout logs of the door, and Kirdy heard the Muscovite cursing steadily. He thought no more of explanations, because he believed that Tatikof had come to seize Nada, in the general looting. The *boyarin* did not look like a man who would forgive a lash of the whip.

It was true that Kirdy could have opened the door and allowed the house to be searched. But he knew that he could give no good account of himself and Tatikof would torture the tribesmen to find out where the girl had gone.

"The Urusses are angry," Toghrul observed at his elbow.

"Ay—blood is to be shed. Have ye bows? Arrows? Then go with thy comrade to the upper openings. Send the first shaft at the bearded *mirza* with the steel hat. In a little, come down and watch the window at the side."

The house was in utter darkness, and Kirdy placed himself in the dining-hall where he could listen to all that went on. Karai stalked from front to rear, his eyes glowing yellow. In a moment a bow snapped, then another. A man cried out. Muskets roared, but still the sharp snap of the bow strings was to be heard.

"Down with the torches!" Tatikof's deep voice ordered.

Kirdy knew that the lights were being quenched in the snow—knew too that the moon was over the house tops and Toghrul had eyes like a cat. The firelocks barked at the house, but the thick walls stopped the bullets, and the Muscovites must have found the arrows too much for them because the axes ceased work and silence fell. Presently the two warriors emerged out of blackness.

"O Kazak," Toghrul proclaimed moodily, "the bearded chieftain wears too much iron. We hurt him but did not slay. Three are down, and the other Urusses be very angry."

"They are at the back."

The axes began anew on the lighter door, and Kirdy posted the other servitor at the side window, while he sought out logs from the hearth to prop up the rear door. Toghrul experimented with his arrows at the near-by window, and discovered that he could do little damage, while the bullets from the pistols of the Muscovites drew blood from him.

"The Urusses will not enter by the windows," Kirdy said to him. "The door will not stand for long. It is better to run out than to be hunted from room to room. Go thou and count how many are at the front."

He went himself and lifted down two of the three bars at the street door, and ran back when he heard boards splintering on the stable side. It seemed to him that the greater part of the assailants were at this point where no arrows could reach them. From the window he could make out a mass of forms in the haze of moonlight—Tatikof, his long sword drawn, urging them on.

Then he felt Karai stiffen against his leg. A wolf howled faintly, not far away. Again the sound drifted through the open window, nearer. Then the door began to fly apart.

Footsteps pattered over the floor behind him, and he turned with bare saber outflung. Toghrul panted at him.

"Down the street the *khanum* comes. She cried out to me. Come now, Kazak!"

Together they leaped through the hall, calling to the other man to follow, and Karai, wild with excitement, jumped upon the door when Kirdy threw off the last bar. They heard the boots of the Muscovites thudding behind them.

"*Nent-en!*" Kirdy cried. "Follow!"

He kicked the door back and ran down the steps that Karai leaped without effort. Several halberdiers, leaning on their long weapons, started up, and two horsemen gathered up their reins. Kirdy knocked down the first spear thrust at him, jumped aside from a second, cutting the man deep in the shoulder as he did so.

Wrenching his blade clear, he parried a slash from one of the mounted *boyare*—a heavy man, too clumsy to wheel his horse for a second cut. He saw Karai leap silently at a third Muscovite—heard the fellow scream, and a pistol roar.

Toghrul was before him now, speeding like a shadow through the gate posts. Down the street in a smother of snow the light sleigh of Nada was coming, a rider on one of the three black horses holding in the others. This, Kirdy thought, must be Karabek, and he found Nada. It was brave of the girl to come back for Toghrul.

But he could not see Nada in the sleigh. Standing up, waving at him, was a young Cossack in a long black coat and a glittering girdle. Gloved, booted and armed, the Cossack might have ridden thus out of the Siech, the mother of warriors. Behind the sleigh, their reins caught in one of the youth's hands, Kirdy's two ponies reared and plunged, frightened by the clash of steel and roar of firelocks.

The sleigh came abreast the gate as Kirdy ran up, and the strange Cossack laughed at him. By that laugh he knew Nada, though her long gleaming hair was hidden under the *kalpak* and the upturned collar of her coat.

"Come," she cried, drawing back to make room for him. A second the sleigh halted, and Toghrul scrambled to the back of one of the ponies, jerking the rein free as he did so. A bullet whistled past Kirdy's head, and over his shoulder he saw Tatikof whipping through the gate, his feet feeling for the stirrups that he had failed to grip when he leaped into the saddle.

Kirdy acted almost without thought. He turned on his heel, ran at the Muscovite's big stallion, while Tatikof snatched at the sword on his far side. He did not draw the sword.

The flat of Kirdy's saber smote him across the eyes—his leg was gripped by a powerful arm, and he was off-balance, half dazed by the blow. Tatikof fell on his back beside the stallion, and Kirdy, who had caught the saddle-horn, leaped up, finding the stirrups before he gripped the rein.

Then he wheeled the powerful charger against the *boyarin* who had first fired at him, and who had followed Tatikof through the gate. Two blades flashed and clanged in the moonlight—the shoulder of the black stallion took the flank of the other horse, and the *boyarin* reeled, groaning.

Calling off the raging Karai, the young warrior wheeled the stallion again, gripped firm with knees and rein, and raced beside the sleigh.

"Nay, come with me, Nada! I go to the river gate."

He saw some of the men-at-arms run out, and a bullet or two whistled past without harm. The other servant must have gone down at the door because he was not to be seen. Nada clapped her gloved hands and sank down on the seat.

"With the flat of the blade!" she cried gleefully. "In his beard Tatikof took it, and he went down like—like a speared boar. It was good to see!"

The rider of the off-horse whipped on his three steeds, the bells of the arched collars chimed faster and faster. They began to gallop, and then to race through the silent streets, as leaves whirl before the breath of the storm.

"It was so," the men of the guard at the river gate reported to their captain, Margeret, the Frenchman the next morning. "No vodka had been given us. But we saw them—three horses black as the pit, and the Cathayan standing up in his stirrups, with his hat gone and his eyes gleaming, and a Cossack in the sleigh singing like one of the angels from Heaven, and a wolf following them. It was so!"

No one had challenged them.

THROUGHOUT Mother Moscow the tale grew and passed from lip to lip. It was whispered at first and then said openly that Dmitri who had been Tsar had escaped the weapons of the nobles.

Warriors who had gone into the Kremyl remembered that a man had been seen to jump from the lower windows of the Terem into the courtyard. A groom of the imperial stables repeated that three Turkish horses had been saddled by order of the Tsar and held in readiness. No one knew what had become of the horses—though the groom was put to the torture.

Then there came a rumor from Kolumna, the nearest town in the east, that Dmitri had been seen there the night of his downfall.

The elder princes of the council debated, and gave out that this must be a lie. The body that had lain in the public square during these three days of bloodshed was solemnly burned, and the ashes fired from the mouth of a cannon. Tatikof was sent with a hundred riders to Kolumna, and there peasants pointed out the keeper of the *kortchma,* the road tavern, as the one who had spoken with the false Dmitri.

"Bring him to me," the great *boyarin* said, and added sternly, "The traitor is dead, so you could not have seen him."

The tavern-keeper came, fear-ridden, and told his tale. In that evening four travelers had drawn up at his dram-shop. They were escorting a sledge. They had loosed the girths of their horses but had not unsaddled. This was at milking time. During the night they played at chess, and did not get drunk or go to sleep.

Along in the cold hours—so said the innkeeper—other horses had galloped up. These were *dobra koniaka*—fine horses. From one, his great Mightiness the Tsar had dismounted, and called for veal and white wine. He had been served, while the first four riders were harnessing the ponies to the sledge; evidently they had been waiting for the coming of his Serene Mightiness. They all talked together and then the Tsar called for parchment and a goose quill and ink.

The others—fine young gentlemen—had remonstrated with him. They seemed to be impatient to get on. But the Tsar laughed and wrote some words on the parchment, folded it and directed that it be kept until called for—

"By whom?" demanded Tatikof.

"By the serene, great elder princes or by Michael Tatikof, so it please ye."

The agent of the *boyare* started and frowned, and frowned still more when the master of the *kortchma* hastened to produce the letter as evidence of his honesty.

"A hundred devils!" cried Tatikof, who was able to read it. "Has any one seen this?"

"Aye, your nobility! A *batko,* a priest it were. He read it to the travelers who came after the illustrious prince."

"May dogs tear you! Why was it read to others?"

"Because, when I told them the tale they said I lied. I showed them the letter, and still they said I lied, because none could read. So they summoned the priest from the church and he came and read it aloud, and then they knew I was telling the truth. There was no harm?"

"Harm!" Tatikof's red face grew darker. "Who were these people that had the letter read?"

The worthy taverner scratched his head, and began to bow, because fear was growing upon him.

"Eh, they were fine folk. They were two young princes from over the border, only God knows where. One had long eyes like a girl, and a gold girdle—"

"And a dog?"

"Oh, aye, a borzoi it were, like a wolf."

"Dolt! It was a girl, dressed as a Cossack, and a Cathayan."

The purple scar on the forehead of the *boyarin* flamed as he thought of Nada and Kirdy.

"What way did they go?"

"May it please your nobility, they bought meat and wine and forage for the horses and departed along the snow road, yesterday morning, eastward."

"Have any others seen this paper?"

"Not a soul! Only listen, I swear—"

The master of the tavern fell on his knees, and his mouth opened in dull horror. He had seen Tatikof draw and prime a pistol. The *boyarin* stepped forward and lowered the muzzle quickly, and the weapon roared in the man's ear.

"—— take him!" Tatikof muttered, when his companions ran up at the shot, "I had not thought there were brains in his skull."

A second time he read the missive, though it was short:

> *Veliki boyare domnui;* mighty nobles of the council—greeting! We are grievously angered by the rebellion of our servants in the city of our governance, Moscow. The time is not distant when your insolence will be chastened by our just anger!

It was signed simply *Dmitri Ivanovitch*—Dmitri, Son of Ivan.

And before he left Kolumna, Tatikof was careful to see that the priest who had been unfortunate enough to set eyes on this letter disappeared from human sight. This accomplished the *boyare* hastened on, eastward, to the frontier.

From time to time they heard of the sledge and the seven riders led by the daring impostor, and once they halted where the fugitives had camped. From this point on, there was only the one road, leading to the Volga.

But they never saw the Volga. They approached near enough to see the smoke of a burning frontier post, and to pick up several fugitives who told them the Tatar tribes across the Volga had risen only a few days before. Muscovite officials along the frontier had been slain, and isolated garrisons massacred.

Clouds of fur-clad Nogai Tatars were visible on the sky-line, restless and merciless as hungering eagles. By night, farms burned like torches along the river. Further pursuit of the false Dmitri was not to be thought of, when fire and sword gutted the border.

Bewildered, encumbered by the fleeing, driven by fear of the Tatar arrows, the *boyare* reined back to Kolumna, and it was weeks before Nogai prisoners were brought in by a patrol of Muscovite cavalry. The elder princes put the captives to the torture at once.

The Nogais swore that Dmitri himself had appeared among them and had shown them a golden apple and an imperial baton set with jewels. Surely he had been the great *Khaghan*, the Nogais said! He had summoned them to arms, they who lived by the sword and desired nothing more than raiding. For the rest, they knew nothing.

The captives were put on stakes and left to wriggle away their lives, and the council of the nobles met in solemn session. There was no longer the slightest doubt that the false Dmitri lived, and had taken with him many of the crown jewels.

He had foreseen the conspiracy against him—and had fled before the *boyare* could seize him. He had slain the unfortunate Bouthinski in his own bed and had leaped from the window of the sleeping chamber. On fast horses, with his intimate followers, he had raced on to where the sledge with his plunder and stores awaited him.

Had he intended the Muscovites to believe him dead, or had he tricked them daringly only to gain a few days' start? They did not know.

This strange being had valued a jest more than his own head, because he had made a last gesture of defiance, at Kolumna—the letter to the *boyare*. And yet—these gray-haired princes cherished grave doubts—was not this letter a new scheme? The career of the false Tsar had not ended. He had wealth, followers and allies of a sort among the tribes. What new evil would he bring forth, to add blood to that already shed?

"As for Gregory Otrèpiev" Tatikof counseled them—the impostor's true name was known by now—"we can not slay him. He, who has blasphemed against God, will fall by the hand of the Almighty. Yet the rumors that he lives must be answered. Already factions are forming against us, and soon brother may draw weapon against brother. Great seigneurs, let us say to the world that this Otrèpiev was a fiend. Though we slew his body he has reappeared as a spirit."*

And Monsieur Bertrand, who was preparing to leave Moscow and its savages, coined one of his *bons mots* upon hearing this:

"If ever a fiend," he pronounced, "deserved to be immortal, Otrèpiev, the False Dmitri, is he."

More than once Tatikof pondered the fate of Nada and the strange Cathayan, but they had disappeared as if the steppe had swallowed them with their horses and wolfhound.

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*Rumors that the false Dmitri still lived were succeeded by a tale that he was a *vourdalak*, a vampire in human form. The Captain Margeret has left in his memoirs a picture of the chaos wrought by the impostor— "The council, the people, the country divided one against another, beginning new treasons. The provinces, unable to know for a long time what had happened, revolted."

CHAPTER IX

> When there is a black smoke ahead, the fool rides on the trail rejoicing; the coward turns back, but the wise man leaves the road and watches all things attentively.
>
> MONGOL PROVERB

THE first day out of Kolumna, Kirdy and Nada covered seventy miles, for the horses were fresh and shod against frost with cleats. The light sleigh slipped over the hard snow like a feather, and Tatikof's big stallion kept up gamely. He was a Podolian breed, up to the Turkish racers in speed, and indifferent to cold.

But Toghrul—who had plastered his cuts with mud and thought no more of them—observed the brown charger shrewdly when they halted that evening, off the trail, and remarked to Kirdy that they could not take the Podolian after the forage had given out. In the open steppe, only native-breds, trained to dig under the snow for grass and moss, could survive.

"Why do you say the open steppe?" Kirdy asked, looking up from grooming down the charger. "God grant that we overtake Otrèpiev before leaving the river!"

The trail for that day had followed the frozen bed of the little Okka, running through forests for the most part. They had passed two or three small villages where they had been told that Otrèpiev's party had passed on, to the east.

"A falcon is swifter in its stoop than the great golden eagle," responded the old man after a moment, "but the eagle is not easily tired. *Bak Allah!* We have six ponies; they have twenty. By changing saddles they can avoid pursuit."

"Canst thou follow the slot of their sledge?"

"Not here. There be too many tracks that come and go. Out on the steppe it is different."

Kirdy was silent while the two men cooked the supper, and not until the fire had been replenished and Nada had settled herself by it in a white bearskin did he speak.

"There must be talk between us. What road do you take?"

" 'Whither goest thou?' the kite asks of the wind. Nay, *ouchar,* since you ran from my house with halberdiers tumbling all over you, like marionettes, you have given orders to my men. You lingered to play with the taverner at Kolumna—aye and the priest, and it is no fault of yours that the *boyare* did not ride up then and take us." She laughed softly, pulling the paws of the bearskin over her slender shoulders. "And now after two days and two nights you frown and ask the road of me!"

Kirdy kneeled beside her on his saddle cloth. Until now he had asked no questions of Nada—why she wore the garments of a Cossack—why she was fleeing to the east.

"I am no longer an *ouchar*—a fledgling," he responded, in his slow drawl. "Once the Cossack brothers gave me a name. They gave me also work to do, and that is why I issued commands to your men."

"Did the sir brothers bid you go to my house, when it was surrounded by foes?"

"Nay, my horses were there—I had thought so. Besides, you might have been there and Tatikof sought you with no gentle hand."

"Oh, it is clear to me now." Nada smiled, unseen. "You are a true Cossack, White Falcon. First you think of horses, then of the *divchina*, the maiden."

Kirdy pushed the ends of the branches into the fire. He found it difficult to choose words in talking to Nada. It was not easy to tell when she was making fun of him. Besides, he had never seen such a splendid girl before.

After two days on the snow road her cheeks, that had been pallid in the town, glowed softly. A light was in her eyes, and her small lips were dark with pulsing blood. In the glow of the fire and the wan radiance of the full moon that had risen over the tree crest her head and hair were beautiful.

Even while she spoke to him she seemed to be listening to the sounds of the forest—to the snapping of wood under the growing cold, to the tinkle of ice falling on the snow crust, and the tiny scraping of an animal's claws somewhere in the darkness.

He wondered why she was more lovely in Cossack dress than in the sarafan of a *boyarenya.*

"When you drove into the street with the horses, Nada, you gave me my life. The *boyare* had penned me. Until death, I swear gratitude to you."

"Will you serve me?"

"In what way?"

Nada tossed her head scornfully.

"*Kai,* the Cossack hero is generous! He offers gratitude and then bargains like a Jew."

"It is not so," Kirdy said quietly. "To the sir brothers I made a pledge. Until that is redeemed, how can I do otherwise than follow the path upon which I set my foot?"

"I have need, White Falcon, of a sword to guard me until I draw rein at my home. Such a sword as yours, for God has sent tumult and trouble upon this road."

Kirdy looked into the fire without answering at once. He had meant to ask of Nada one of her ponies. By changing from the charger to this mustang he was sure of overtaking Otrèpiev within a week. He knew now that the false Dmitri had escaped from Moscow, and he was glad that the issue between them would be settled in open country where the Cossack was at home. How he would manage to get his enemy within reach of his sword he had not thought. Circumstances would decide that.

"Nada," he said, still pondering, "you wear the *svitka* and girdle of a warrior of the Siech. You speak as one—" they had ceased to avail themselves of the Manchu-Tatar, and it was clear that the Cossack speech was native to the girl.

"My father is a Zaporoghian."

"Honor to him! What is his name?"

"Come, and hear it!"

"I may not."

Kirdy bent forward to look deep into Nada's eyes. He stared so long that the blood darkened the girl's cheeks.

"I will wager my life there is faith in you," he said at last.

A shadow touched her brow, and she seemed to be vexed, for a reason he did not understand. But she listened attentively while he told her how he had come to the Cossacks from the southern steppe, how the army of the Siech had been betrayed by Otrèpiev, and how he had sworn to Khlit, the *koshevoi ataman*, that Otrèpiev should pay with his life for his treachery.

"The brothers are more foolish than wolves," she cried angrily. "For they fall into a trap; then they lick their wounds and begin to think of vengeance. It has always been like that, my father said. Why do you trust me?"

"I do not know."

Flinging herself back on the bearskin, Nada rested her head on her crossed arms and gazed up at the shining sky.

"*Kai*—give me horses, let me ride until a bullet brings me down! That is what you would say to me if you could find words. And the Cossack maiden must sit in her sleigh and pray for the young swordsman who has less sense than his charger that can not get at the grass under the snow! You would never overtake Otrèpiev!"

"He may be a fiend, as it is said; but if he is a man I will find him."

"Did ever a *bogatyr* of the Siech," Nada asked of the stars, "swear so many vows or pledge so much in one short hour!"

This time Kirdy flushed, unaware that dark eyes were watching him under long lashes, and Nada hastened to make him more uncomfortable.

"In Holy Mother Moscow of the White Walls, I saw Gregory Otrèpiev many times. He rides like a hero, and he is handsome, much more so than you are. The wife he took from the Poles is a painted puppet; he left her with little sorrow, nor did she remain at his side. Otrèpiev may be a fiend, but surely he is king of all the wanderers and monarch of the daring! I watched him at sword play with the Frankish officers. He laughed and tossed their blades first to one side, then the other, and to me he bowed to the knees, saying that I was more beautiful than any Muscovite. I wonder who he is?"

"A soul," Kirdy responded in his slow fashion, "that feels neither remorse nor any fear. A man who could have been the greatest of emperors, if he had faith and honor in him. In all things he succeeds himself, yet brings death and torment to others."

A moment of silence followed, while Nada studied Kirdy from the shadow of her arm.

"And yet—alone among men he can play with crowns for stakes. A beggar, he sat on the Eagle Throne of the Kremyl! An exile, he wrote a letter bidding the *boyare* fear! If I—"

She paused and Kirdy remained grimly silent.

"If I were to meet Gregory Otrèpiev wandering in the steppe with his crown and his sword, I would share bread and salt with him."

"And pray for him?" Kirdy asked, smiling.

He had not meant to mock the girl, for he could understand her spirit. But Nada was not inclined to endure a smile.

"Aye, pray to St. Ulass, the Good, for him—and for all outcasts."

"Where is your home?"

It occurred to Kirdy that if Nada's house were near at hand, she would not need the extra ponies. They were, in a way, his horses, but since Nada had saved them for him, and since she had two men to mount, he did not mean to claim them.

"In the Wolky Gorlo."

"The Wolf's Throat? Where is that?"

"Beyond the border, across the river where the sun rises."

"That is far."

"Aye, my White Falcon. I sought the aid of your sword upon the way, but since you have sworn an oath—" she glanced at him, with amusement that vanished in one of her sudden changes of mood. "You do not know whither Otrèpiev draws his reins!"

"Nay, the trail is blind. Yet he must ride farther."

"Soon the river turns sharp to the north. If he is for Kazan, which is the trading town of the northern frontier, he will follow it. If he strikes for Astrakhan, on the southern sea, he will turn off. But if he goes on, into the steppe—that way my road lies, to the eastward. Can you keep a bargain, Cossack?"

She pulled the bear's paws over her face, leaving only dark, grave eyes visible when Kirdy frowned blackly.

"*Kai*—I think you can, Cossack. You are a fool, but—" she chuckled aloud—"I will wager my life there is honesty in you! Well, we are agreed. If Otrèpiev turns north or south, I will give you one of your horses back, with gratitude, and you can ride off and be killed like a dog. If he keeps on, to the tribes, you must come with me. Nay—"

She forestalled a swift objection.

"Kazan and Astrakhan lie many weeks' ride distant. But the river Volga he could reach before you can come up with him. I know the trail."

Kirdy nodded. She had spoken the truth. He wondered what course the fugitive would take on the Volga.

"If he crosses," Nada observed, "and he is bold enough to do that, you must go through the Wolky Gorlo, to meet him. Now, my White Falcon, you must let me sleep. You have talked so much I am yawning. But is the bargain struck?"

"Agreed!"

"Then you will see tomorrow that Nada can fly over the steppe as swiftly as any *bogatyr* of the Siech."

She snuggled down into the voluminous folds of the bearskin, wrapping the head and paws about her, and Kirdy strode away, too restless to sleep, wondering how he had come to talk so much. Usually he said little enough.

Presently Toghrul appeared out of the shadows with an armful of wood and stirred up the fire. Although he did not appear to look at them, his slant eyes took in the silent woman and the angry Cossack, pacing from the horses to his blanket, and when the old man returned to his sheepskins he kicked Karabek out of slumber.

"The *khanum* bids us to saddle when the stars are low, before the moon is out of the sky. By the beard of Azrael, it is as I said! Until now the Cossack has led, and when the *khanum* takes the rein there will be more than words. Two hands on the rein and neither will yield to the other."

NADA, it seemed, had guessed Otrèpiev's course. They came the next evening to the great bend in the Okka and learned from a caravan of merchants that had just crossed on the ice that the sledge and seven cavaliers had taken the Volga road.

"They are merry—the young gentlemen. *Ekh*, what horses!"

And Toghrul proved to be right in the matter of horse-flesh. For a while he pressed the three blacks with all the skill of the nomad he was. He would rub them down himself at night, water and feed them sparingly, sleep with them, and talk to them at the start before the rising of the sun.

Then he would let them walk for a while before trotting. At a word from him they would work into a light gallop, and the ground would flash past until Toghrul chose to bid his steeds halt. Then they would walk, stretching out their necks, until they were breathed. Kirdy noticed that Toghrul managed them by voice, and gave little heed to the reins.

By now he was pretty certain of the tracks left by Otrèpiev's cavalcade, for the sledge had unusually narrow iron runners and some of the ponies were unshod. He prayed that there would be no heavy fall of snow, and that the ice in the Volga would be going out.

Winter was ending, and at midday the sun made the footing soft, so that mud began to appear on the trail—though everything froze hard at night. The villages were fewer—a scattering of *choutars* around a log church or fort, in a valley. The timber was thinning, except for dense stands on the tablelands.

From passing traders, Finns or Armenians for the most part, who were coming in from the border with furs, he heard that Otrèpiev was still two full days in advance of him. It would be quite useless to take even three horses and try to come up with the fugitives before they reached the river.

Toghrul pointed out that they must wait over a day at the next farm until the charger was rested and the *kabardas* had slept their fill.

"Why did you think that Otrèpiev would strike for the Volga?" he asked Nada.

"How? Does a stag not start up from the thicket when the wolf pack gives tongue? He would take the boldest course."

"That would be to cross the river. Why?"

"On the far side the Nogai tents are assembled here and there. The Tatars come in at winter to trade their furs and plunder across the river when the ice is good. He can hide himself among them."

Kirdy knew this very well, but it surprized him a little that Nada should know what went on beyond the border. The Nogais had been driven out of Kazan and Muscovy by Ivan the Terrible, not two generations ago, and they were far from peaceful. But the Tsar Ivan had massacred tens of thousands of their warriors in that day, and this had earned their hearty respect.

The trail brought them to the Volga at last, on a gray day when the sun had disappeared behind clouds. Kirdy searched the bank of the river that was like a dark valley between white hills. Toghrul agreed with him that Otrèpiev had crossed at once.

So the horses and the sleigh were led across, and the story that was written in the far bank drew Kirdy for an hour's searching of tracks. What had happened was clear as a minstrel's tale.

Here a Nogai *yurta* had been, where one of the tribes had winter quarters. They had penned their cattle behind fences, and had eaten the animals that died of starvation—for the Tatars never saved up hay for the winter. Otrèpiev's party had gone into the *yurta*, and at least two days ago the whole had moved off—the Nogais loading their felt tents on wagons and driving their cattle.

A storm would hide the trail of the tribe, and once this was lost it would be a long and anxious matter to find trace of Otrèpiev again. On three sides of him stretched the steppe, with its treeless expanse of rolling ground, its vast spaces where the blast of the wind was more to be feared than Tatar arrows—its isolated burial mounds where spirits could be heard crying at night. Kirdy knew it well.

Nada, her coat collar turned up over her hair, her slim waist girdled tight, and her hands thrust into the wide sleeves, looked about her and turned to him curiously.

"Would you follow the Nogais, who have followed Otrèpiev?"

"Aye," he said.

She pointed to the leaden bank of the sky in the north that seemed to spread darkness over all the world.

"It is coming, the snow. Before morning, perhaps before night, it will end the trail. Look at Toghrul!"

The old man was stamping about by the horses, cursing the Nogai camp that had left not a bit of grazing on this part of the river; his impatience and uneasiness were unmistakable.

"Can I get hay at your Wolf's Throat?" Kirdy asked.

"Aye, and meat."

"Where lies this Wolky Gorlo?"

"Yonder."

Nada pointed inland, diagonally away from the track of the Nogais.

"Is it a Tatar *yurta?*"

The girl laughed gleefully.

"Ask the black-haired people!" she cried, dropping into the dialect of the tribes. "Ask—if they come near the Wolf's Throat!"

"In the name of Allah the Compassionate!" Toghrul's plaintive cry drifted up to them, "Are the horses to stand until their bones stiffen?"

Kirdy knew that he must go first to the Wolky Gorlo for food and forage for his horse, and then must take his chances at tracking down Otrèpiev in the open steppe.

"Come!" Nada called to him.

Toghrul drove as if possessed, swaying on his seat, singing to the three black heads and the manes that tossed like surf under the beat of the wind. The *kabardas* sped as if possessed by devils—or as if scenting their stables—over long ridges and the black beds of streams without sign of a road. Kirdy's charger gathered himself together and did his brute best to follow. The other man and the two mustangs were left far behind.

"Come!" Nada's clear voice came back to him. "O Kazak, do you fear this road?"

The road, to be sure, was unprepossessing. Winding through barren uplands, it dipped among a nest of rock gullies where the charger stumbled and came up blindly. The gray sky pressed lower, and the sleigh was beyond sight; only the tinkling of the bells was to be heard. This ceased, and when the wind blew from her direction Kirdy caught the girl's voice lifted in song that mocked the oncoming storm.

A somber twilight fell, while Kirdy plied his whip, and watched the landmarks on either hand. It seemed to him that they were descending sharply. Soon whirling flakes, heavy and damp, shut out everything except the horse and the trail.

He reined in the charger to listen, and to look for Karai. By the rock walls, rising in pinnacles and mounds on both flanks, he judged they were entering one of the long ravines that break the even surface of the steppe.

Yellow eyes glared at him from a bend in the trail, and he snatched at the sword before he was certain from the behavior of the horse that it was Karai and not a wolf that waited his coming. The dog, contrary to his usual custom, pressed close to the charger's legs, his hair stiff on shoulders and neck, and his fangs a-gleam.

Wind devils whined above his head, the towers of black granite closed in on him and the drifting flakes stung face and hands. The charger snorted and edged cautiously between two boulders.

The storm had set in, and all trace of the sleigh was lost. Nothing was to be seen, but Kirdy rode on stubbornly, sure that there could be no other way. He had the feeling of coming out into an open valley, when Karai bounded forward, and he beheld two eyes of light in the distance. A few paces more and he saw the glow of windows upon the falling snow, and the black mass of a log cabin.

KIRDY dismounted and knocked with numb fingers on the door. Then he stepped aside, because he was now across the river and it is not well to venture out of darkness into sudden light in the steppe, where Asia begins.

"*Ai Kazak!* Do you fear because you have come to the Wolf's Throat?"

Nada's voice from within challenged him, and he strode to the charger, leading him around the cottage to the lean-to that served as stable. When the saddle was off and the horse was blanketed, he entered the cottage, stooping under the lintel.

By the white-tiled stove sat an old man, shielding a candle from the blast of air that swept through the open door. He rose, leaning on a staff and peered at the young warrior.

"*Chlieb sol,*" he said, and bowed. "My bread and salt is yours."

Once he must have been as tall as Kirdy, because he bent over, resting heavily on his stick. He moved stiffly, in his Turkish robes, but his boots and shirt were of Cossack make. Though his face was lined and his long hair gray around the forehead, he had the clear and alert eyes of middle age.

What held Kirdy's silent attention was the man's head-gear—a white wolfskin, with a great broad head overhanging his brow. The white muzzle with the long fangs surely had belonged to a monarch of the wolf-folk.

"Omelko am I," vouchsafed his host, "and it is a day of days that brings to my *choutar* a hero of the Cossacks."

"Health to you," responded Kirdy. "Rest I would have and meat and forage for the horse. My road is far to the end."

Omelko hobbled to the stove and filled a long horn with hot brandy, offering it to his guest. Kirdy took it, and spilled a few drops to the four quarters of the winds, and lifted it.

"*Hai, bratiki kozàki*—to the Cossack brothers! To the heroes of other days."

"Glory to God, young warrior."

"For the ages of ages!"

Kirdy emptied the horn—not to do so would have been an insult to his host, and the blood warmed in his chilled limbs. Although he had never heard of a Cossack living beyond the river, he felt sure that this man was Cossack-born. If so he was as safe within the four walls of the *choutar* as in the barracks of the Siech. He unslung his sword, threw off his sable coat and stretched his boots toward the stove.

"A splendid borzoi," Omelko observed, "and full three-quarters wolf. How did you come by him?"

"Found him three-quarters starved beyond the Jaick, and fed him. He has not left me. Down, Karai!"

He knew that his host had taken note of his Cathayan garments, but Omelko, rubbing Karai's throat, was too courteous to question his guest before they shared food—or else Nada had already spoken with him. The girl brought them supper—mutton, with barley cakes, cheese and honey, and filled his horn with brandy in utter silence.

"Nada is a devilkin," Omelko remarked, shaking his head. "When she is off like that, there is always trouble. Last time she came in with her horse nearly dead and a *chambul* of Tcheremis' stag hunters at her heels. Eh, they drew rein at the Wolf's Throat!"

"Why?" asked Kirdy, who desired to know.

"No Tatars will enter the gorge, past the two rocks. When they trade, they leave their gear outside and Nada takes it in, putting in place of it what we will give them. But for two days the storm will close all the paths."

The hut was built of pine logs, roughly smoothed, the chinks filled with moss and clay. The floor was sand, neatly raked, and there was a pleasant odor of herbs. Above the table Kirdy noticed a long *yataghan* with a fine ivory hilt, and an ikon stand with a gilded painting of the good Saint Ulass.

By the roar of wind in the trees above the gorge and the rattle of hard snow against the horn windows, Kirdy knew that the storm would last, as his host had said.

"That is Nada's sword," nodded Omelko, and his lips twisted under the beard. "*Ekh*, I would not let her take it, this time, because she is too swift to draw steel, and she is no match for a swordsman. The blade of yours—I have seen it before."

"It was Khlit's—the *koshevoi ataman's*."

Omelko was silent for a while, ruminating.

"I am glad of the storm," he said, "because you will tell me of Cossack deeds, and the wars of the heroes."

Far into the night the two Cossacks talked over the wine horns, until Nada, who had been sewing in silence on the other side of the stove, slipped away to her room. With the garments of a Cossack maiden, with the kerchief and *beshmet*, a shyness had come upon her, and Kirdy, glancing covertly from under his brows, wondered at her flushed cheeks and lowered eyes and wondered still more if this were the girl he had followed in that swift ride through the Wolf's Throat.

When he had stretched out on his coat to sleep, Omelko went to the shelf by the ikon stand and took down a parchment-bound book, reading far into the night. At times he closed the book to gaze at the face of the sleeping warrior; and at times he raised his head as if to listen to the note of the wind.

Then Karai would spring up silently, and trot back and forth behind the door.

CHAPTER X

OMELKO'S DREAM

FOR two days it snowed. The paths indeed were closed to caravans or travelers, yet through the drifting curtain of the storm, riders passed from *yurta* to *yurta*. They were neither shadows nor ghosts; they were living men and Tatar messengers.

And as soon as the stars came out, during the second night, black masses of warriors moved out of the encampments.

It was noticed by the sentries of the Muscovite frontier posts that a star fell before the long hours of darkness were at an end. There was heard, too, the distant howling of wolves in every quarter. After the storm the great packs of the steppe were afoot.

In the Wolky Gorlo long before dawn Kirdy was roused by the stamping of the ponies in the lean-to. He went to the door and looked out. Clouds were drifting across the face of the old moon, almost overhead, but the white surface of the glen and the dark, timbered sides could be made out easily. Satisfied that the far-off howling came from wolves and not from the dreaded specters of men that ride at times upon the steppe about the places where they gave up their lives, he quieted Karai and stretched his arms. The frost had gone from the air and the night was almost warm. Out of the darkness behind him Omelko spoke.

"The gray friends are hunting. The pack has come down out of the heights."

Among the Cossacks, wolves were called

gray brothers, yet these words stirred the interest of the young warrior.

"They hunt, aye," he said. "But one pack is like another."

"But that is the great one, from the heights. Often it passes through the Wolky Gorlo. Its leader is of large size with part of his tail torn off."

Kirdy knew now how the gorge had been named, probably by Tatars who had reason to fear the hunger-maddened packs of the steppe, especially in winter. He wondered why Toghrul and Karabek slept on quietly in their felt tent by the lean-to. If the pack were approaching the gorge it would be best to light fires—

For a while he listened. The quavering note of the pack had changed, had dwindled and risen again savagely, and now seemed to come from a new quarter and to resemble the high-pitched shouts of men.

"The gray friends," Omelko's voice proclaimed, "have met riders—many men. They will not pass through the gorge."

But Kirdy, who had been putting on his boots and belt, had closed the door, thrusting Karai inside. Seeking out the bay stallion, he saddled him in the darkness and was ready to mount when he noticed a man peering in at the shed entrance. After a moment he recognized Toghrul.

"O Kazak," the old Tatar complained, "is the night so long that thou must even groom thy horse before the stars have set?"

He grunted when Kirdy mounted, and he saw the youth was fully clad and armed. "Take heed!" he muttered. "The Nogais are on the move."

"Whither?"

"Am I an eagle to look down from heights, or a dog to smell the trails? One of their paths runs to the right of the gorge as far distant as two arrow flights. I will go with thee."

"Stay with the horses—thou!"

Leaving Toghrul muttering, the Cossack rode up the gorge, avoiding the drifts. The going was heavy, but the high wind had swept stretches almost clear and the light was good. Half an hour later he came out on higher ground and reined in to search the neighboring knolls with his eyes.

Presently he saw what he expected to find—a tiny figure on a distant rise, no more than a dark speck that might have been a sitting wolf or a stone except for the glint of light when the moon's gleam struck a polished spear-tip slung on the Tatar's back.

Avoiding the watcher, Kirdy trotted down into a nest of gullies where the charger labored through drifts. He judged that he was well behind the sentry when he came on a broad trail stamped down by a score of ponies. The warrior with the spear still sat on his eminence and Kirdy refrained from stalking him, knowing that more Tatars would come along the trail presently—if the sentry had not been withdrawn.

As soon as he heard hoofs, he wheeled the stallion and began to trot toward the river. Men approached from behind and a deep voice spoke at his elbow.

"Is the horse lame, that thou hast fallen behind the trail breakers?"

"*Yok,*" Kirdy made answer. "No, I have word for the *tï-soultan.* Where rides he?"

In the depths of the gully the darkness was impenetrable, except for the shimmer of starlight on the heights above them. Kirdy heard a pony trotting beside him.

"The lord," the same voice made answer, "rides with us. What word dost thou bring?"

"I have steel," Kirdy promised grimly, "to crop ears that be over-long."

The invisible rider snarled, a saddle creaked, and Kirdy reined a little to the side. But the tribesman swallowed his anger.

"*Bil ma'ida!* Surely thou art a servant of the *Khaghan?*"

Kirdy left it to the other's imagination whether or not he might be a servant of the Tsar. And he drew aside to wait for the leader of the clan. It would not do to ride on, out of the protecting gully. The Tatars, having encountered him going in the same direction, had no reason to suspect him.

It could hardly enter their minds that a stranger would appear at that hour between their advance and the main body—a stranger who spoke their language and asked for their leader. The sheer daring of Kirdy's action protected him, so far.

Ponies trotted past, and occasional riders came close to peer at him, and to hear him ask again for the *tï-soultan.* His nostrils filled with the odor of sheepskins, of mutton grease and sweat-soaked leather. These men had come far that night and, judging by the scattered words that reached him, were bound for the river.

"Here is the *tï-soultan,*" a Nogai called presently, out of the darkness.

Kirdy wondered fleetingly why the leader was not one of the tribe, and why another answered for him. A white horse and a rider in loose, light garments took form in the obscurity, and a mellow voice grumbled—

"What dog is this?"

Kirdy's pulse throbbed in his temples, and he ceased wondering. The man had spoken in fluent Persian, to himself, as if hopeless of gaining understanding from those around him.

"*Tourkät,*" grunted the Cossack, "One who speaks Turki."

"By the Ninety and Nine Holy Names, that is good hearing!" cried the rider of the white horse. "O the smells unmentionable, the pains past bearing, the fear clinging like a shadow! O the woe of these times—"

The breath left his lips in a gasp. Kirdy had reined the stallion around until the two horses touched shoulders, and during the outburst of the stranger had drawn his sword silently. Now a quarter inch of a steel tip had pierced the small of the man's back.

"Dogs there be, beyond doubt," the Cossack said grimly, "and fools likewise; but the greatest of fools is he who wags a loose tongue. Hold thine, therefore, or feel the length of this blade!"

The stranger said no more, nor did he move. Kirdy waited until the body of Nogais had passed, making astonishingly little noise, like men intent on what lay before them.

"*Nent-en!*" Kirdy commanded sharply. "Forward thou!"

And the pair who had lingered to accompany the stranger, or to satisfy curiosity, went on again. Still Kirdy waited, moving the sword-tip a little, to keep his captive from thinking too much, until the rear guard had trotted past, with a long shout—to warn the watcher on the height that he should come down. It was a similar shout, much fainter, that Kirdy had heard an hour ago from the door of Omelko's cabin. He was grateful to the superstition that made the tribesmen cast a wide circle around the Wolky Gorlo. And he was just as well pleased that the riders of the rear had not seen him and the stranger. Reaching swiftly behind the other, he pulled a scimitar from its scabbard and thrust it through his belt. Then he felt for knives, finding three of different shapes in as many places. These he cast to the snow.

"*Ahoun!*" he said to his captive. "Forward!"

But he turned the head of the white horse, keeping the rein in his left hand and guiding the stallion by his knees. They walked back to the other gully through which the Cossack had entered, and down this they trotted—Kirdy removing the sword-tip generously.

In the east the stars were fading, and a kind of gray obscurity spread through the network of hollows and ridges around the Wolky Gorlo. When trees were visible against the snow, Kirdy peered at his captive, and saw enough to convince him that the man was neither a Muscovite officer of the false Dmitri—as he had hoped—nor a Nogai chieftain.

At the narrow pass between the two boulders that formed the Wolf's Throat, he reined in and waited until full daylight. The Nogais, when they missed their leader, would have turned back long before this.

"Eh," he thought, "it is true, then, they will not enter this place." Aloud, he added, "What man art thou?"

The prisoner salaamed, bending almost to the Cossack's stirrup.

"Prince of swordsmen, Lion of the Steppe, I am thy slave— the interpreter of dreams. Thus they call me, Al-Tâbir."

He was a broad, round man, wrapped up in a half-dozen *khalats* and vests, all gorgeous purples and blacks, with embroidered slippers and a sash that must have aroused the instant envy of all the Nogais. A small turban was knotted jauntily over one ear, and the face under the turban was pale and round as the full moon. Kirdy had seen cows with just the mild brown eyes of Al-Tâbir. He laughed, thinking that he had just risked torture to fetch this Persian—because the interpreter of dreams, smelling strongly of musk and civet, was as Persian as the gold-inlaid scimitar he had worn—from the tribesmen.

"May the dogs bite thee, Al-Tâbir!—what makest thou in this place?"

Taking heart from the laugh, the interpreter of dreams raised his head.

"Nay, I am truly Jahia ibn Muhammad al-Nisapur, cup-companion of the Shah, whom may Allah exalt. Out of his courtesy the Shah sent me to the great emperor of the Urusses. It was written that I should find this emperor dead and another seated upon the throne. This other, being pleased with my conversation, commanded me to attend him upon his exile. I heard—I obeyed."

"Thou wert a man of Dmitri's?"

"Truly, his *sahab*, his companion. He revels well, but rides too much."

Kirdy tapped the sword blade that rested on his saddle peak.

"Al-Tâbir, in times past I have hearkened to Persians. I heard many lies and little truth. But thou, O my captive, shalt tell me truly what has happened. Or thy head will cease from thinking and thy tongue from lying. Where is thy master?"

"By the face of the Prophet, I know not. Yesterday he drank wine in the tent of the khan of the Nogais. He laid a command upon me to go with a warrior to another clan. I went."

"Wherefore?"

"It is my thought that he sent one of his companions to different tribes, as hostages, perhaps."

"The Nogais called you leader."

"Allah! Not a word of their talk is known to me. It is my thought that the Tsar sent commands to them, and they looked upon us as ameers, greatly to be feared. They fear the Tsar. So do I!"

Kirdy smiled.

"That I believe. Now think again, Al-Tâbir—what orders were sent?"

"Surely the command was to rise and arm against the Muscovites. The Tsar makes war against his ameers. The Nogais will cross the river. I am content to be rid of them."

The lips of the Cossack hardened under the mustache and his eyes narrowed. He had not expected that Otrèpiev would dare loose the tribes against the frontier posts. The man seemed able to breed chaos even in the steppe.

"Then the Nogais believe he is the Tsar? Why?"

"*W'allah!* Why not? He showed them jewels from the chests—even the gold apple, and the scepter that bears a ruby as large as my thumb. Their khan had seen the jewels before. Besides, they were ready enough to make raids."

Kirdy nodded. All this was possible. The border would be fire- and fury-ridden, and the very ice of the Volga stained with blood. So, pursuit from Moscow would be checked.

"But," he said thoughtfully, "after a while the Tatars will know that he has no power, that only six men ride at his back—then they will plunder him."

Again Al-Tâbir salaamed.

"O youth, and scion of battles—in thee there is wisdom even sufficient unto thy courage! This thing the Tsar has foreseen. Within a week he will ride from these pagans—may their graves be dug up!"

"Whither?"

"To the east."

"To what place?"

Al-Tâbir searched his memory, with an eye on the Cossack's sword, and decided not to lie. The young warrior knew a deal too much to make lying either safe or profitable.

"To the place where the sun rises. It lies behind the Mountains of the Eagles, and it is the country of the Golden Horde."

FOR the second time Otrèpiev had hidden his trail. Only, the first time he had slain a friend so that he might leave the body in his own bed; now he had slain hundreds, and the dead and dying along the river had concealed all trace of him.

No longer could the Muscovites follow him. Months must pass before the Nogais would be driven across the river again, and the caravan paths opened.

And now the way of pursuit was closed to Kirdy. Although the storm had ended, although the fresh snow on the steppe would reveal the tracks of a fleeing man—although Omelko had promised him horses, hay and meat, he could not ride forth.

From the east, from unexpected places, the more distant clans of the Nogais would be coming in, as vultures flock to a feast. No craft or skill would serve to avoid them. On the white waste of the steppe a rider would be seen by the keen eyes of the nomads even on the horizon; the Cossack's trail would be picked up inevitably. Moreover, it was extremely probable that the Nogais had left men to watch the two openings of the Wolf's Throat into which Al-Tâbir had disappeared so unexpectedly.

Meanwhile Otrèpiev might do any one of a number of things. At any day, with his fast horses and his sledge with narrow runners, he could start on his journey into the unknown part of the steppe. Who could say what he would do?

Nature itself would hide him in another fortnight, because already the thaw had set in and presently the plain along the Volga would be a morass, the earth soft to its marrow, after the melting of seven months' snow; no rider then could cross the steppe near the flooded rivers.

All this Nada told Kirdy, quite aware that he already knew it, but moved by curiosity to learn what he meant to do.

"God gives!" she said. "And here, surely, is the end of your road."

Kirdy, who had been sitting against the sunny side of the cabin, looked up at the clear sky, the fir-topped walls of the valley. Where the snow had melted from boulders the rock showed black and moist. From the low-hanging branches of the birches came a steady *drip-drip* of water. A pony neighed in the shed.

"By the grave of Otrèpiev I will know the end of the road, Nada."

"But he is far away! Only our brother, the eagle, flying low, sees him. Only the wolf noses about his fire."

Kirdy smiled, and when he did so, his dark eyes glowed.

"In such fashion the road ended at the City of the White Walls. And yet—we followed it hither."

"And is this not a better place than that town?"

"Aye, so."

Kirdy made response in his slow fashion, looking up at the girl frankly.

"Would you be alive outside, in the steppe—anywhere but here in the Wolf's Throat where the Nogais dare not come?"

"God gives, little Nada!"

"How did you capture the Persian? Tell me!"

"Eh, it was in darkness. I spoke to him, and he was so glad to hear his own speech he came with me."

A slender, booted foot stamped impatiently near Kirdy's knee.

"It was not like that at all. I can understand him, a little. He is afraid of you, and he called me a *shal-i-begum*—that's a Flower Princess, isn't it? Are you going to kill him? His sword is too light and curved but the mare is splendid—*dobra koniaka!*"

Kirdy looked up quickly.

"Don't let the Tatars harm him. I want him alive."

"Why? What good is he?"

"He can tell you the meaning of a dream. The science of the *tabir* is much esteemed by Moslems. They glean prophecies out of dreams, and no doubt the prophets glean gold. Jahia, or Al-Tâbir is well born."

Upon this Nada went off to ply the captive with questions and Kirdy continued to sit by the hut, drawing lines in the trodden snow with the butt of his riding-whip. He had gone among Nogais to try to get tidings of the man he sought; but he had satisfied himself that the entrances of the Wolf's Throat were watched and he knew the uselessness of trying to escape when his trail would be clear to such keen eyes. Only by an effort did he restrain his impatience, and settle down to watch for the chance that might open the way into the steppe.

That evening Nada held the entire attention of the three men. First she sang—the half barbaric and wholly plaintive songs of the Cossacks that quickened Kirdy's blood and made her father call for more *gorilka*. Then she teased Omelko to tell the young warrior stories of the past, and the lame man took fire at her persuasion.

"Eh, sir brother," he cried. "Once I followed the little Mother Volga. What is there to say? You know the way of a Cossack youth—to revel in the tavern, to mount when there is war. That was my blade."

He nodded at the *yataghan* with the ivory hilt, and the wolf's mask—that filled Al-Tâbir with fascinated dread—nodded likewise.

"A gray stallion I stole from the khan himself, from the stables of Bagche-Serai. I rode to Kazan, which was then a Tatar city. In the bazaars were Greeks and Tcheremises and God knows how many else. I drank, for days, until I saw not one but several suns in the sky. I drank down the gray stallion—everything but my trousers and that blade. Why not? Other horses were to be had, and I was young. But then began a great firing of cannon and the Greeks said the city was besieged."

He stroked his beard and pushed aside the parchment book that was his companion of evenings.

"Eh, Falcon, what shall I tell you? I went on the wall, and many foemen felt the edge of my sword. After a time when I could see the real sun, I heard that these foemen were Muscovites led by Ivan the Terrible. What matter?

"The walls of Kazan were stormed after much fighting and the Tatar dead filled the alleys. Some of the tribesmen broke through, I with them. The armored *boyare* were all around—thick as flies in the slaughter yard. We tried to swim the Volga, but there were boats, and I was taken up by warriors of the Tsar who thought at first I was a Muscovite. In time men saw me who knew me for the Cossack who had fought on the wall. They should have cut me down, or blown me from a cannon.

"Instead they put my legs in the rack and broke all the bones. Then they carried me across the river and flung me out on the plain. Eh, that was an evil thing. Wolves came and sat by me but did not tear me. I could not crawl. Toghrul rode up—he was then a hunter of stags. He tied the ends of two saplings across his saddle-horn, and wove branches to make a drag. So he brought me to this valley, where he had his tent.

"*Ekh ma'a!* Why should a man want to live, when he can no longer ride? Yet I lived and in time could walk with a staff, as you see. He it was, my brother, who carried to the valley for refuge a Cossack maiden, a captive of the Tatars."

Omelko's grim head sank on his breast and he sighed.

"Nay, I was no longer a hero, no longer a Cossack! Of what avail my life? She would not leave me, when the way was open. She was the daughter of an *ataman*, and Nada was her child—she dying at that time."

From the sunken eyes of the old Cossack tears crept down his cheeks and he clasped his staff in gaunt fingers that still were powerful.

"How shall I tell this tale, sir brother? She was in all things like Nada, with a temper like a sword edge and a heart that was like a very flame of love. She knew many legends of my people that brought me joy in the hearing, and before Nada was born she wrote them down in that book, and taught me the letters. Now I—who am no priest—can trace out the legends and many a time have I read them over to Nada."

For a while he was silent, his eyes traveling from the sword to the picture of the saint on the wall. To Kirdy there was nothing strange in the life of this girl, who had grown up tended by Tatars, who had hunted stag, and had dared to journey alone to Moscow to listen to the talk of Christians and bring back to Omelko tidings of the world across the river.

"God provided for Nada," Omelko said finally, "or she would have been lost to me. This was the way of it. I dreamed one night that an old man came into my *choutar* and sat by the fire, saying, 'Omelko, my son, your suffering has been great.'

"Then, in the dream, my guest rose up, saying, 'I give you power over my children the gray friends, the wolves. They will hunt for you, and you shall be *koshevoi* of the wolves.' "

Omelko nodded at the gilded picture upon the wall.

"Surely that was Saint Ulass! Now, hearken, my brother—I woke up, and went to the door. It stood open, and all about the *choutar* wolves were sitting, like dogs.

"I saw, in the clear moonlight, the leader of the pack, a gray wolf with a part of his tail torn away. Often since then the great pack has come down from the heights, passing through the Wolky Gorlo. And then I say, 'A merry chase to you, brothers!' "

Kirdy pondered this in silence, and Nada met his eyes.

"It is true, my Falcon," she said, "that the wolves have not harmed this *choutar*. At times, when I have hunted, I have seen the pack running about me. The Tatars believe that my father has power over the wolves, and they will not enter this place."

At this Omelko shook his head, and reached for his glass.

"Nay, it is the good Saint Ulass who has protected you, my daughter. It is—" he added to Kirdy with a smile—"to keep the tribesmen in awe that I wear that wolf's muzzle. Now, my Falcon, let us drink. Glory to God!"

"For the ages of ages!"

CHAPTER XI

Only a ghost, sitting on a tomb,
enjoys the garlands of dead flowers.
PERSIAN PROVERB

DAYS passed and Kirdy fought down his impatience to be in the saddle. One sunny afternoon he heard the whisper of freshets released from the barrier of ice, eating their way down into the valley from the heights, and he groaned, clasping his head in his hands. By now whatever trace Otrèpiev had left would be lost to sight and soon the steppe would be closed to horses.

More faithful than the Cossack's shadow, Al-Tâbir had kept close to him in the Wolky Gorlo. The interpreter of dreams looked askance at the Tatars and Omelko, but for Nada he had heartfelt admiration. Now he believed he had discovered the reason of the warrior's brooding silence. He ventured closer and sighed.

"I have seen! Who would not despair? A mouth like the seal of Suleiman—hair blacker than the storm wind—eyes like a gazelle—teeth like matched pearls—form like a willow! I, too, would cast the ashes of longing upon the fire of life!"

Kirdy looked down at the stout little man, frowning.

"What dream is this?"

"A flower of the garden of blessedness!" The Persian raised plump hands and sighed profoundly. "Why should she wear a sword? Her eyes slay without mercy and her voice binds with chains that may not be broken."

"Is it Nada?" Kirdy contemplated the sympathetic native without favor. "Then bridle thy tongue, because if she hears thee she will make trial of the edge of that *yataghan* without fail."

"Allah forfend! Nay, *sahab*—how can a man who looks upon her say otherwise?"

In Moscow the interpreter of dreams had noticed that the wives and daughters of the *boyare* were kept in seclusion, and it did not occur to him that Cossack women were treated differently. But when he looked into Kirdy's eyes he saw that he had not made amends.

He had meant to condole, in a complimentary way, with one who—as he judged—had experienced the pangs of love for a beautiful woman. Instead, although the White Falcon had not threatened him, the skin of his back felt cold.

"Can'st thou truly foretell events from dreams?" Kirdy asked gravely, but Al-Tâbir answered without hesitation:

"That gift have I. Six hundred times have I done so, and it is all written in a book by scribes."

"Then tell me the meaning of this!"

Kirdy repeated to the Persian the tale of Omelko's dream and the coming of the wolves. Al-Tâbir remained in thought for some time, shaking his head the while.

"How can there be good in wolves?" he muttered. "They who are aided by the *djinn* will die! Take me from this place, young Lord! *Ai*, a fear and a foreboding comes upon me!"

In truth fear grew upon the interpreter of dreams, until he would not let Kirdy out of his sight. Al-Tâbir was far from being a fatalist where his life was concerned, and he was shrewd enough to understand that Kirdy could protect him from the people of the Wolky Gorlo, and that the Cossack had taken pity on him—as strong natures will protect weak.

That night Kirdy was kept awake by his own restlessness and the Persian's wanderings. For Al-Tâbir ceased not to peer from the windows and mutter to himself. Karai, too, kept sniffing at the door, until the Cossack was brought to his feet by a moan from the native.

"*Ai-i!* Look!"

Kirdy flung the door open and peered out. As his eyes adjusted themselves to the gloom, he noticed shadows passing across the snow. Here and there, for a moment, twin balls of yellow fire glowed and vanished.

"Here, Karai—*zmag!*"

The Cossack called the wolfhound that had slipped out the instant the door was open. But the dog did not come back, and after a moment Kirdy started after him. Al-Tâbir divided between dread of the wolves and unwillingness to be left alone, hung about the door until a sound within the cabin brought him around like a startled bustard.

Stooping over the stove, Nada was thrusting a length of knotted pitch-pine into the bed of coals. Reeds had been wrapped about the stick, and when the end of the torch kindled, she waved it over her head, laughing at the Persian who saw in this some new incantation.

Al-Tâbir retreated to his corner and left Nada to run alone after Kirdy, the long torch swinging over her.

"It is the great pack," she said over her shoulder as he strode to her side and took the firebrand. "Look, there is the leader."

They advanced slowly, because the wolves, though circling back restlessly, were too numerous to be driven easily—gaunt beasts high in the shoulder, and by the look of them, more than half starved. Nada pointed to a wolf with only a remnant of a tail, and caught Kirdy's arm.

"See the borzoi!"

Just beyond the circle of light Karai could be made out, moving silently toward the pack. To the Cossack's call the dog paid not the slightest attention, and when Kirdy started toward him Nada held back.

"It is too late. We must go no farther."

There was hardly a sound—a rending snarl, the spluttering of the pine. To Kirdy's surprize the wolves nearest Karai were sitting on their haunches in a rough half circle, and in front of them the scarred leader appeared of a sudden—a blotch of gray streaked with brown.

Karai no longer trotted; he moved into the torchlight stiff from nose to tail, his throat rumbling, his fangs clashing. The borzoi and the gray wolf did not face each other—for the wolf sprang too swiftly, and slashed open the dog's shoulder-blade.

From that instant they were barely visible—Kirdy thought that the wolf rushed again and was thrown off. The clatter of fangs, the thunderous snarls and the impact of the shaggy bodies dwarfed all other sounds. The pack pressed closer, and the yellow eyes glowed more strongly.

Once the ring of beasts started up, as Karai almost lost his footing. But he was up and whirling on his hind legs in the same instant, blood spattering from muzzle and shoulders.

Again and again the gray wolf slashed at him, and Kirdy heard the unmistakable snap of a bone broken between steel jaws. Once more the wolf pack surged up, and now the leader was visible. The bleeding Karai had drawn away.

But instead of whirling on powerful legs, the gray wolf staggered. Blood streamed from its throat. Maddened and fearful to see, the wolf bristled, snapping its fangs—as if to drive back by menace the fate that inevitably awaited it. It was bleeding to death, the throat torn open.

Karai rushed in, and the wolf was thrown. Then the pack ran in, and a hideous snarling arose as the wolves tore the living flesh from the crippled leader.

Nada and Kirdy had drawn back to the door of the *choutar*, and the Cossack could make out Karai's great form, a little apart from the others. Then the borzoi was lost to sight, and the shadows once more flitted from side to side.

"Vain to call him now," Nada said quietly. "He will run with the pack. Look!"

The clearing was empty. From the wooded slope of the valley was heard a single howl, quavering and plaintive as the call of water-fowl. A full throated chorus answered it, drifting farther away.

"At times he may come back," the girl went on, "but you are not now his master, White Falcon. Aye, he has slain, and is hunting with the pack. A merry hunt to you, gray friend!"

Kirdy listened in silence. He had loved the wild Karai, and he knew that what Nada said was true. More wolf than dog, the borzoi had cast off the fellowship of men for that of his own kind.

"Go and sleep, little Nada." He raised his hand, and a deeper note came into his voice. "May the holy angels watch over you!"

She looked up at him quickly, but for once could read nothing in his eyes, or guess what was in his heart. On the threshold of her door she glanced back, anxiously, and found his eyes still upon her. They glowed an instant, and then were veiled, as if ashes had been thrown upon a fire within them.

For once Kirdy sat quietly beside Omelko, who read aloud to him from the book of his dead wife, until Al-Tâbir snored lustily in his corner, and the young warrior put out his hand, closing the sheets of the book of legends.

"Time—it is time, Omelko. Do not wake your daughter or the Persian drone. I must go upon the road."

Omelko sighed and looked at him inquiringly. During the last few days he had wished many times that the dark-browed hero were his son, that the White Falcon would remain at the Wolky Gorlo.

"The wolf pack hunts along the valley," Kirdy answered the unspoken question of his host. "The Nogais who have been watching will be afraid for their horses. They will build fires in the timber, or seek their *yurtas*. The way out of the Wolf's Throat will be open this night."

"And after?"

With his usual deliberateness—when there was no need of haste—Kirdy was filling his saddle-bags, taking dried meat, barley and other things of the Cossack's store. Omelko saw that the warrior would not answer the question. After all, who could know what the future held?

"Take what you need, my brother. Another horse."

Kirdy nodded.

"I will take two of the steppe-breds. Yours is the stallion."

"I shall give him to Nada." Again Omelko sighed. He was aware that Nada was fond of the White Falcon, because he knew the wayward moods of the young girl. "Do you draw your rein east?"

"Aye."

They went out to the stable and here Omelko bade Kirdy take two of the black *kabardas*, saying that they were equal to a sultan's steeds, and would fare for themselves. In darkness, Kirdy saddled one, and strapped on the goatskin bags. On the led horse he placed the sack of barley, and a bow and arrows that he had bought of Toghrul.

"Well, you must go!" said Omelko. "But the road to the east has not been traveled before; they say only the ghosts of the dead camp beyond the Nogais. Go with God, my Falcon!"

Kirdy mounted, after drawing his girdle tighter and putting on the wolfskin cap that Nada had made for him. He wheeled the pony, but reined in and came back, to lean close to the lame man.

"Eh, it is not easy to part from friends. I would like to have a cross from Nada, that she had kissed. Yet it is in my mind that if I bade her farewell, she would seek to ride a way, to show me the trail. And it is best otherwise, in this night of the wolves and the Tatars. Guard her, Omelko, for—for she is a dove and a brave heart. God knows I owe my life to her. Out in the steppe there is death as well as life. If I ride back, I will come to the Wolky Gorlo. *S'Bohun!*"

He did not urge the eager horses into a gallop, as usual, but reined them in, walking out of the *choutar* so as not to disturb the sleeping girl.

And after he had disappeared into the darkness without a sound, no tidings of him reached the river, or the Wolky Gorlo. No tidings, except for the tale of a Nogai *orda* that had drifted in from the uplands of the Chelkar, scenting plunder. The tale was told at the *kibitka* on the Volga to the khan of the Nogais, who was in great anger at that time because the emperor who had come out of Moscow and taken shelter in his tents had left him without warning or leave-taking.

"O shield of the faithful, Lord and companion of Ali—master of Tur—master of our herds, protector of our lives—Lion of the plain and the rivers, in this wise was the happening." So the Chelkar tribesmen declared, sitting in the tent of the khan. "And lo, it is a thing difficult of understanding, and a mystery beyond thought!

"Allah had caused the morning to dawn, and the mists were not yet gone when we saw riding toward us a man with a wolfskin cap and a sable *khalat*, as far distant as you could hear a loud shout. Now, on either hand of this rider ran wolves, more numerous than a flock of our wild sheep.

"The wolves did not attack the two black horses of the rider, though their bellies were drawn. The leader of the wolves was a great gray beast. And it is not a lie, but the truth that our eyes beheld—the leader of the pack ran back to the horses, and for the time that milk takes to boil, trotted beside the man, doing him no hurt. Nor did the man strike the beast.

"We said, 'God is one!' And the rider passed from sight into the mists. Surely he was a *ghil* of the waste lands, a spirit of the dead that lacked a grave. Otherwise we would have slain him, for the horses were greatly to be desired.

"Now, the sun was not on our faces that day, when we met a Nazarene *khanym*, mounted on a bay stallion. Our young men rode about her, and she whipped them, saying that she was the daughter of the khan of the wolves and we would eat woe if we hindered her. Among our hunters were some who said that this thing was true.

"Lest the curse of the wolves be laid upon us, we did her no harm, only asking whither she held her way. It is likewise true that she said she sought the warrior with the two *kabardas*. When we released her, she went forward upon the trail of the man and the wolves.

"Now, in the next hour we beheld a fat Shiite on a white horse, riding as if a fiend sat on the crupper. We had drawn our arrows to the strings when this son of many fathers cried out *thy* name!

"*W'allah!* He showed us a *khalat*, a gift from thee. And to one who understood his words he explained that he had been taken captive into the Wolf's Throat. Though he had escaped, his soul was sick from fear. We let him pass.

"We did no harm to the three, remembering the Wolf's Throat where aforetime thousands of thy people went to their graves as to beds under the swords of the Muscovites. We hastened to thee. And this is truth—even as it is true that the spirits of our slain ancestors dwell today in the wolves of that pack.

"So we salaam before thee, asking leave to go, O Lord of our lives, to draw the sword across the river."

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAIL BEYOND THE RIVER

SNOW still lay in the hollows and in the rock nests where the sun did not touch. But the earth was damp and a soft blur of green was to be seen on the gray bushes that covered the hillocks. Spring had come to the steppe.

A warm wind rippled the forest of rushes that stretched down from the knolls into the flooded river. And this river, without a boat or sail visible on its dark surface, murmured in satisfaction, like a man full fed. Beyond its edge black pools of water also had their voices—the song of myriad frogs that felt the growing warmth. By the thin smoke of a fire two black horses snorted and tossed their heads as Kirdy parted the last fringe of rushes and strode toward his camp, a dead heron in one hand, a bow in the other.

With the bow he held an arrow, a light shaft with two tips that had struck down the bird rising in flight from the river mud. The man looked at the sun, sinking to the edge of the plain, and turned aside to a hillock where he knelt, gazing intently in all directions. In the bare plain—that was like the bed of the ocean at sunset—nothing, apparently, was to be seen. But the Cossack noticed slender gray forms, blending with the blur of brush—wolves, evidently full fed. For a moment he studied them without surprize. They had appeared around his camp at intervals during the weeks since he had left the Volga and the leader of the pack was surely Karai, the giant borzoi.

The wolves had not attacked his horses, perhaps because Kirdy had lived for a while with the wolf master of the Wolky Gorlo, perhaps because Karai, the leader, had once been the Cossack's dog.

Kirdy did not bother his head about why things happened on the steppe. He was grateful to the wolves because they had frightened off the Nogai tribesmen who would otherwise have killed him for his horses.

If he had met one of the still more to be dreaded riders of the steppe—a spirit that had crept out of a murdered body that had not been buried—he would have reined to one side with a "Luck to you, sir brother!"

But, as he waited for the plucked heron to cook on the wooden spit over the fire where a handful of barley was already boiling in his one iron pot, he pondered men and their ways and especially the men he was following. He took out of a goatskin sack a worn leather horseshoe with the remnants of wooden cleats. Placing this before him, he added a tarnished silver coin with a hole in its center and a length of thin hemp rope.

These three things he had found by the ashes of a large fire to the north of his camp. Around these ashes at the edge of the river he had seen the tracks of a score of horses and the wheel track of a wagon. Now the men he had been following had with them a sledge with narrow iron runners, and a similar number of ponies. Back on the Volga their trail had revealed no wagon.

Moreover there was something curious about this trail. He had followed it back a little into the steppe and had spent a day in making wide circles without picking it up again. It ran to the ashes and it did not go away again. He had noticed many of the cleated horseshoes lying around.

He was certain that the man he sought, Gregory Otrèpiev, had camped at that fire, for several days. The silver coin was a Muscovite coin and the hole in it showed that it had been used as an ornament on a horse's rein or a saddle. The rope, too, was not native workmanship.

Otrèpiev and his five companions had not turned back toward Muscovy. They had crossed the river and entered the unknown world that lay beyond it.

Kirdy knew this because the tracks had extended to the fire at the river's edge and had not left it. The six men had waited at their camp until they had hailed a boat, or a raft drifting down the river. The cleated horseshoes they had discarded because the horses no longer had to pass over snow. For the same reason they must have removed the runners from the sledge and fitted on the wheels that had been lashed to the sides.

So he was glad that he had found the camp site, after a week's careful search of the river's edge for that very thing. Only a tribesman or a steppe-bred Cossack would have discovered it and learned from it that on the other side of the river the trail would be that of a wagon and a score of unshod horses—

But he had discovered also this thing that troubled him, the worn leather shoe at his feet. A Cossack cares for his own horse, always, and Kirdy had cut out that same piece of leather at the Wolky Gorlo, and had nailed on those cleats. It was a piece of ox-hide with the hair still on the inner side.

The shoe had been on the off forefoot of the bay stallion Kirdy had left at the Wolky Gorlo as a gift for Nada, the daughter of the wolf master. Nada was a wild girl, as apt to ride after him as to follow the trail of Otrèpiev of her own accord. Except the great dog Karai, Nada was the only living being that Kirdy cherished in his heart.

Had Nada tried to follow him? Had she fallen into the hands of the Otrèpiev party? Or—and Kirdy remembered how Otrèpiev's daring had stirred the girl—had she sought the false Tsar of her own accord?

A horse like the bay stallion, he knew, was a magnet that might draw every thief along the Volga. The charger might have been stolen. Kirdy—although he had examined every inch of ground in the camp site—had seen no other traces of Nada.

His eyes gleamed under knotted brows.

"May the Father and Son grant that I come up with them!"

But, however his spirit burned in him, he did nothing in haste. When he had eaten he threw the bones far enough from the fire to be sure that the wolves that came after them would not approach the horses. Then he led the ponies off to water and picketed them. He piled more brush on the fire and rolled himself up in his fur.

He slept lightly because he meant to start before dawn, and several times the stamping of the horses roused him. He felt rather than heard movement in the black abyss around him, and—because it is not well to sleep when others are astir in the steppe—put on his boots and coat, feeding the fire to new life.

As he did so he caught the flash of animals' eyes. The gaunt gray form of Karai moved into the circle of light and flung itself down at the Cossack's side. Kirdy put out his hand and rubbed the wolfhound's throat and Karai growled softly as was his wont.

"Well, brother," the young warrior smiled, "you have run with the pack and I'll warrant you've had the pick of the girls. Will you come with me across the river?"

Again the dog rumbled, the broad head stretched upon the bony paws, the amber eyes intent on the face of his former master. Karai was restless and uneasy, as if anticipating some evil beyond his ken. The other wolves remained without the firelight—gray shadows against the outer blackness.

When Kirdy saddled one pony and lashed the goatskins on the other a little after daybreak and went to the water's edge, Karai paced beside him. The Cossack had discovered a shallow stretch where the horses were able to keep their feet half way across. The river* was in flood, but the current sluggish, and the black *kabardas* struck out for the far side without hesitation, the Cossack swimming, Tatar fashion, holding to the tail of one pony.

They made the crossing and Kirdy looked back. Karai was still sitting on the western bank, and the wolf pack had come down to sniff at the tracks.

"Ili, Karai—smag!" Kirdy called, and waited, hoping that the wolfhound would bark, or run up and down the bank. But the gray beast remained sitting until it threw back its head and howled like the wolf it was. The pack gave tongue, some of the wolves leaping off toward the brush. Karai took his place at the head of the pack. Once he stopped, on a rise, to look back across the river. The long, quavering cry of the hunt swelled and dwindled into distance.

"Eh, gray brother," Kirdy murmured, "you served me well. May you have good hunting!"

The loss of the wolfhound saddened him for a day. Karai had gone from his side, to the steppe. And Nada, too, had vanished as if the earth had swallowed her and the bay stallion. The Cossack quested far to the south, searching for the trail that must show where Otrèpiev and his men had landed. Then for a week he rode north without seeing so much as the track of a horse. No human being appeared on the sky-line.

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* This must have been the Ural river, then called the Jaick, the farthest landmark in Central Asia known to Cossacks or Muscovites.

For the third time Otrèpiev had hidden his trail—first by the body of a dead man, then by fire and sword, then by water. How was a man to be found in that wilderness of lush grass, of thickening brush and flooding watercourses? The Cossack was on the edge of the known world; beyond the river, he could still return to Ayub and wise old Khlit and say truly that he had followed Otrèpiev until all signs failed.

But Otrèpiev had once sworn that he would press on, to the Golden Horde. And this would be like the reckless spirit that had prayed to a grinning mask.

For the Golden Horde was no more than a name, spoken by wanderers. Some said the Horde was to be found beyond the Earth Girdle, others said the Horde was not made up of living men but of spirits, penned eternally behind a rampart far toward the rising sun.

All these matters Kirdy pondered for a day while he rested the *kabardas* and repaired his arrows. Then, well content with his course, he set out. Lacking a trail, he turned his horse's head toward the rising sun.

THE grass of the steppe grew long and tough, and the wind dried up the dark pools of water in the hollows. Instead of purple, the shadows lay gray on the plain, and haze was in the air, like a veil. The "whirling plant" rolled and tossed before the wind and often on the sky-line black smoke appeared.

For the length of two moons, Kirdy pushed steadily toward the rising sun. He passed through a land where the earth itself was gray, and a white froth spread around the pools of water—salt. Here the only game were antelope herds, and wide winged bustards, and man and horses suffered before he turned north to seek for a river.

If he was to go on, he must find good grazing for the *kabardas*. He had fashioned his goatskins to hold water, and made new saddle-bags out of antelope hide—though he had little enough to carry. The barley was about gone, and only a few cups of brandy remained in the leather jug.

The land began to rise as he went on, and instead of finding grass he entered a barren and rocky region. During the two months he had met few human beings because he avoided the larger clusters of tents, only riding up to the fires of two or three men—thin-faced nomads with long greasy hair, who tried first to bargain with him, then to beg. Their language he did not know but he had no doubt whatever that they were born thieves as well as idol worshippers and filth eaters. More than once he had to draw his sword.

When he asked where lay the *Altyn Juz*—the Golden Horde—these creatures merely stared at him or shook their heads. But once or twice he saw them glance understandingly toward the east, and he thought they knew the name of the Golden Horde.

Although he did not come upon a large river, the nature of the land began to change again. The dry tamarisk growth yielded to thickets of birch and aspen. In the valleys now he met rivers flowing from the the east, and since these were full in midsummer, he knew that far beyond sight they were born on the upper tiers of great mountains where the snow melted slowly under the touch of the sun.

"In the beginning," he said to himself, "the streams ran from the west."

It was the first sign he had that he was coming to a different land.

KIRDY knew cattle country—knew that this was a mellow, ripe land, well suited to cattle—and he began to be puzzled.

It was rolling grassland, thinly wooded, with the blue lines of hills wandering here and there against the sky. Fish were in the streams and some of these he caught while the *kabardas* rested and rolled and healed saddle sores. And at times the Cossack saw gray clouds of sheep near at hand—enormous masses. He heard dogs bark from behind the sheep. The sheep were heavy and fat-tailed—certainly they had not been driven far.

When he rode on again, he observed horses grazing on the uplands, and though they galloped off before the *kabardas*, he made out that they were branded. They were shaggy beasts, swift-footed, evidently at home. Once he saw camels stalking on the sky-line.

But no men were to be seen. Certainly the cattle and sheep were not wild—dogs did not shepherd mountain sheep. In the steppe the beasts of a tribe are always guarded, unless the owner is so feared that enemies dare not take what belongs to him.

And in the steppe, rich grassland such as this with abundant water in midsummer is a prize to be fought for and held with bullet and steel until the coming of frost drives herds and men to the southern pastures.

At night the Cossack could make out no fires, or any smoke by day. The herds seemed masterless. Unless—and this puzzled him sorely—the flame he had noticed one evening had something to do with them.

It came out of a gully at deep dusk and flitted out of sight before he could do more than stare. It might have been a "whirling plant" afire and wind-driven, because the flame swung in circles. But there was no wind, and Kirdy thought that it was a man on a swift horse, swinging a torch in his hand to keep it alight. He would have saddled and followed, but the *kabardas* were spent after a day's run—and Kirdy had heard of the *ghils* of the steppe that led travelers astray in just this fashion.

That night he slept lightly, and wished heartily that Karai were at his side to growl a warning of enemies.

Before sunrise he climbed a rise behind his camp and looked to the east. The air was cold, without haze. And the Cossack drew in his breath sharply.

Under the flood of crimson and the mantling clouds he made out a dark line, jagged and yet symmetrical. A line of mountains at a great distance. And while he watched the summits of the range began to glow as if fires had been lighted within them. From rose and red, they changed to orange and then to the glitter of sheer gold as the first rays of the sun struck through them.

"A hundred devils!" Kirdy whispered, frowning.

There were many of these snow peaks at an unguessed height and distance. Often in the Caucasus and Mazanderan he had seen isolated snow peaks, but never so many—that looked like the crenellated towers of a battlement. Below them he could discern the veils of fog.

Then the golden glow faded, the mist seemed to rise and form a thin haze that shut out the gigantic battlement of the mountains—if indeed it really had been there. Kirdy had seen more than one mirage in the steppe, and he had been told by the older Cossacks that such things were the work of Moslem wizards, to betray wanderers.

"Herds without masters—a circle of fire—mountains that come and go—Allah, here is either enchantment or a very strange land!"

He looked again for the mountains at sunset, but there was no sunset. The air was black, and the cold breath of coming rain swayed the white stems of the birches. Kirdy led the horses into a ravine where he had noticed a shelving cliff on the sheltered slope. He had barely rubbed down and tied the ponies when drops pattered on the outer rocks. Far off, thunder muttered and lightning flickered faintly. Kirdy looked for wood and found under his sandstone shelf only damp loam. So he moved his almost empty saddle-bags and the furs out of the wet and prepared to sleep without food or fire. Pouring out a cupful of the precious corn brandy, he lifted it, with a muttered—

"Glory to God!"

In the act of drinking he stopped to listen. The rain was coming down in gusts, and the thunder was rolling ominously. Yet he thought he had caught the slapping of hoofs up the gully. One of the *kabardas* snorted.

A rending crackle and roar overhead was followed by a moment of comparative quiet, and Kirdy was sure that there was movement in the outer darkness, more than the spatter of rain and soft rush of a freshet near his ledge. Distinctly he heard the creaking of leather and ring of bit chains.

Then the white glare of lightning lighted up the ravine, the shining drops of rain, the threshing trees. On the slope across from Kirdy a horseman stood motionless as a stone figure—a squat man in a towering hat, astride a shaggy pony, peering ahead as if on the edge of a bottomless pit.

"For the ages of ages!" Kirdy concluded, and tossed down his *gorilka*.

This, he reflected, was the hour after sunset, the hour of ghosts. And surely the diminutive figure on the black horse resembled nothing human. The Cossack knew what he must do.

He touched the cross on the hilt of his saber and thrust his dagger into the ground near his boot. If the apparition of the mounted dwarf were a Christian soul riding the steppe in torment, the cross would give it comfort. If, however, it were a *ghil*, or evil spirit, it would climb upon the dagger and so disappear into the earth—Kirdy jumped suddenly for the *kabardas*. He had heard one beginning to whinny. In a second he had grasped both the velvety muzzles. And again came the lightning, revealing this time a score of strange riders. He could see the steam rising from their soaked sheepskins, and the flash of their eyeballs as they looked at him.

Then the pall of darkness, and sounds drawing nearer—guttural chuckling voices, sibilant whispers, the clatter of hoofs on rocks—and a harsh challenge.

"*Yarou—yarou!*"

Kirdy drew his sword with a sharp grating of steel that he intended them to hear, and then there was real silence for a moment.

"Kneel!" the harsh voice bade him. "Put down thy weapon."

The words were Tatar, and Kirdy heard them with satisfaction. These riders, then, were not marauding Kara Kalpaks, or Turkomans—though they were certainly not the Tatars of the Gobi. He answered promptly, because armed men on the steppe are tolerant of neither silence nor fear.

"Are ye men of the *Altyn Juz*—ye who ride in the night and the storm?"

"*Kai*—ask of the storm who we be! Kneel!"

The stamp of hoofs and the heavy breathing of near-winded ponies drew closer. Kirdy stepped forward and laughed.

"O ye men of the night! I am Ak Sokol. My mother is the steppe, my father the great river. Never will I take grass in my teeth and cast down my weapon."

"*Bil ma'ida!* Art thou in truth the White Falcon?"

The speaker seemed surprized, even a little startled, and Kirdy took instant advantage.

"Aye, so. I ride to the Golden Horde."

Afterward, he wondered how these men could have heard his name.

"Verily all things are possible with Allah," the voice said musingly. "Even that a father of lies should have uttered the truth!"

"Aye, Sorgai," cried another, "here be the two *tzanurar*—the two good horses."

"And the sword," put in a third. "Slay the unbeliever and take what he has on him."

To this Kirdy made no response, because there is a time for silence, as well as for insolent speech. And, as he had expected, the leader of the riders turned upon his followers angrily.

"With what words will ye answer the khan when he asks concerning the mission of this wayfarer. Nay, he shall not be harmed, but he must ride with us."

"Whither?" Kirdy demanded.

Out of utter darkness came the response.

"To Tevakel Khan, Lord of the plain and the mountains, Keeper of the Way, Master of life and death and Khan of the Golden Horde."

CHAPTER XIII

The Cossack rides in the night—
there is no one to cry after him.
PROVERB OF THE STEPPE

BUT not for long hours did Kirdy see the face of Tevakel Khan. The Tatar horsemen went swiftly south, keeping him in the center of their formation and he made no effort to escape because he knew there were eyes close at hand that could see him when he could not make out the head of his horse—and because from their talk he gathered that another captive had been taken a few days before. When he thought of Nada he whipped on his horse, and the Tatars growled at him, asking whether he burned to kiss a stake or be torn by horses.

Once they were challenged by a wailing cry from unseen heights, and again, in a lull of the storm, Kirdy saw a ring of fire moving toward them. This proved to be a pine knot, swung in the hand of a rider, who spoke to his captors and galloped off. Then, though the rain shut them in, he heard other bodies of horsemen moving in the same direction.

They circled around restless herds of cattle, and above the bellowing of weary beasts Kirdy caught the long-drawn cry of distant horse herders, and the barking of excited dogs.

Because even Tatars do not ride like fiends through a storm, or leave immense herds without shelter on the steppe, he knew that something unwonted was taking place on the steppe.

They passed through the outer tents of a *yurta*, and slowed to a more reasonable pace. Coming to what appeared to be a massive wagon, they bade Kirdy dismount and enter it, assuring him grimly that his horses would be cared for—if he ever claimed them again. The wagon materialized into a wide cart with solid wooden wheels, the whole of it taken up by a round leather dome that smoked at the summit.

Aware that he was being watched and that hesitation would avail him nothing, Kirdy lifted the scabbard in his left hand and raised the flap of the *kibitka*—the nomad wagon-tent.

A fire of camel dung glowed in the center of the floor on its clay bed. The space around it was carpeted, the sides filled with bulky leather sacks that looked like headless giants huddled together and smelled both sour and pungent. From the far side of the fire a figure rolled out of a rug.

"By the Ninety and Nine Holy Names! By the beard of Ali, from whom I am descended on the right side—my heart rejoices and my spirit is uplifted at sight of the prince of swordsmen, the White Falcon!"

It was Al-Tâbir, the interpreter of dreams, and there was no doubt of his joy at beholding the Cossack. He drew off the youth's soggy fur mantle and flung his arms around him.

"Now may Allah grant thee increase of joy. I wasted, in sorrow—the blossom of hope was killed by the frost of calamity—"

"Enough. What seek ye here, Al-Tâbir?"

"Seek? I am sought. I am the leaf that drifts down the river of happenings. Happenings! I have fed upon disaster—"

"Is there aught to eat in this *yurta?*"

"Aye, and to drink."

Al-Tâbir made a wry grimace, and Kirdy saw that his broad, pale cheeks were indeed wasted, and his cherished beard, that ran from under his chin to his ears, ill-kept.

"Behold, O youthful Kai Kosru!"

He took up a lacquer bowl and slipped the thong from the vent of one of the great sacks with a skill that hinted at considerable practise.

"Mare's milk, sour and fermented."

Kirdy gulped down the warm and heady liquid, which he knew was food as well as drink, and Al-Tâbir, after a mournful allusion to the vintages of Shiraz, followed his example.

"It brings oblivion," he said, with a sigh, "if you drink enough."

"Where is Nada?" demanded Kirdy, who had no sympathy with oblivion.

"Where? Nay, she is lost; she is no longer at my side. *Ai-a*, an ocean of the nectar of beauty, a rose-heart—"

"Hast thou seen her—dead?"

Something in the quiet voice of the young warrior made the Persian roll his eyes around, and he noticed that Kirdy gripped the ivory hilt of the curved sword until his arm trembled. Taking this as a warning, the interpreter of dreams hastened to explain.

"Nay, I rode with her to this place. Then she bade farewell, and now the false Shah is at her side."

"Who?"

Al-Tâbir glanced fleetingly at Kirdy's sword-hand, and struggled inwardly.

"The lord who is called Otri-pief."

Seated on the rug nearest the fire, moistening his throat ever and anon with the draft that was not a vintage of Shiraz but brought oblivion, the interpreter of dreams told Kirdy all that had passed since they left the Wolky Gorlo.

"Now when I drew my reins from the dogs-without-eyelashes* I pressed on swiftly, desiring to come up with the woman who had gone before me. Solitude is evil and solitude upon this northern plain is worse. By favor of the All-Compassionate and by the fleetness of my gray Arab, I did overtake the woman called Nada when she had lost thy trail and was searching hither and yon—"

"She followed me?" asked the Cossack quickly.

"As a brown-winged falcon a hare. But thy trail was no more to be seen. Nada's brow grew dark as a storm-cloud, and she sought until the light also had gone."

Kirdy groaned and beat clenched fists on his knees. He had suspected that the Nogais might decide to turn back after him, and had been at some pains to hide his tracks in a network of pools that first day.

"Nada was clad as a Kazak youth," went on the interpreter of dreams with a sympathetic glance at the warrior, "and she was beautiful as a Circassian boy; she also had food, and that *yataghan* that hung upon the wall of her father's house. She was angry, but she took compassion on me and shared bread and salt. Then she said that since thy trail was lost she would turn to Otri-pief, because it would come to pass that by companying with the Muscovite lord she would see thy face again—"

"Let no more than one lie escape thy lips, Al-Tâbir, and thou shalt taste steel in thy throat."

"By the beard of Ali, by the Ka'aba, and my father's grave, I swear that these words be truth! Lo, for many days I followed the young woman. *Ai-ee*, my body ached from the rubbing of the saddle. We went from *aul* to *aul* of the plains-dwellers, Nada showing them the picture of the old man and the wolf that hung at her throat."

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*The Nogais.

Kirdy remembered the ikon painting of Saint Ulass and the wolf that the girl cherished—and the fear the Nogais had of the great wolf pack.

"The plains devils became afraid when they saw the picture—being image worshippers, no doubt. When we reached a broad river they led us to the tents of Otri-pief on the near bank. The Muscovite lord looked twice at Nada, and laughed. It is in my mind that he knew at once she was a woman, for he pulled off her hat, and beheld her hair, like gold. The five companions of the lord who were drinking red wine, raised their cups to her, and asked of me if I had been to Pèristan, that I rode thither with such a fair-faced houri at my side. They did not laugh when Nada spoke to them, naming them fools."

Al-Tâbir shook his head and sighed, his hand moving out toward the leather cup.

"Otri-pief said, 'Nay, all begotten men are fools, and the wise are they that know it!' Nada looked at him and took back her cap, pointing across the river. She declared to the Muscovites that if they rode to the Golden Horde they would never find the way across the plain; and at the end of the plain they would in any case be slain by the guardians of the Mountains of the Eagles.

"Then the Lord Otri-pief questioned her as to how she knew of such matters. Whereupon Nada swore to him that once when she was a child, she had journeyed with her father as far as the Mountains of the Eagles, and there they had been obliged to turn back by the watchers who dwelt on the way to the city of the Golden Horde.

"The Muscovite lord asked what manner of city this might be, and she laughed at him, saying that a leader of men should not need to ask concerning the end of his road. She said the dwellers in this city had learned the secret of riches and happiness and all delights of existence. Then did Otri-pief swear that she should lead them to the city, and he would turn back for no power of earth, though—so said he—no delight could be imagined greater than the joy her beauty yielded to his eyes.

"And when the cup-companions of this lord saw that he desired the woman above all things, they did not molest her, but entreated her in courteous-wise, and she did in truth beguile them with song and story and quip—with the tricks of her horse, and her merry ways.

"But when Otri-pief would have caressed her, she showed him the sword girdled to her waist and said that if he would take her hand in his he must first overcome her at sword-play, and one or the other might die therefrom. Now the fate of men is in the hand of Allah, and Otri-pief's pride was a great pride. It may be he was tempted to overcome her with his sword, because he fenced with his companions before her eyes. When he did so, she made light of him, saying that not long since she had held fellowship with a warrior who was his master at sword-strokes. And it is in my mind, O White Falcon, that her thought did then dwell upon thee.

"So the pride of Otri-pief was stirred, and he boasted, saying that he would make himself master of the city of the Golden Horde and would rule even as a king. Then he swore he would claim her as his. And to this she made response that if in deed Otri-pief became king of the city of the Golden Horde, she would be his.

"With that the lord was content, because he ever had a mind to mighty accomplishments, and Nada led him verily across the dry lands toward the place where the sun rises. And to me she said it was a merry hunt—fools pursuing folly, and at the end of the road only God knew what. Yet I believe that she knew."

The fermented milk and the solace of companionship cheered Al-Tâbir, and he only wished he could make out the thoughts of the brown-faced warrior who sat across the glowing bed of dung.

"How came Otrèpiev to hear of the Golden Horde?" Kirdy asked, rousing from his silence.

The interpreter of dreams ceased to feel warm and comfortable. He rubbed his hands together and spread out lean fingers gracefully.

"I beguiled him with the tale at the *sarai* of the Muscovites."

"Thou?" Kirdy looked up in swift surprize that was not reassuring and Al-Tâbir made haste to justify himself.

"Only hear me, prince of swordsmen. Forbear to cast the flame of wrath on the carpet of companionship. When the Muscovites commanded me to tell tales, I obeyed. Why not? It may be that a small matter of a lie or two escaped my tongue. But I told Otri-pief of the *Altyn Juz,* and it pleased him—"

"What tale was this?"

"The tale of Abou Ishak, of Samarkand, who was a great traveler, almost as great a one as I. Long ago a sultan sent him forth to seek for the Earth Girdle. Surely our wise men have said that the earth is girdled about by mountains—by a great rampart that holds in the water of the seas and the soil of the land. Now, behind this rampart in the west the sun sinks at the end of the day and from the eastern rampart the sun rises at dawn. How could it be otherwise? Nay, do not frown, my Lord. The earth is like a shield and the rampart is like a rope stretched taut about the circuit of the shield. The rampart is called Caf, in my speech, but among the northern folk it is called the Mountain of the Eagles."

Kirdy thought of the snow range he had seen the previous dawn and held his peace. Al-Tâbir refreshed himself and went on.

"Now this Abou Ishak—a man of some note in his day, and a writer of a book or so, though there was little faith in him—this Abou Ishak cried out with a loud voice that he did find the mountain Caf where the sun rises—a mountain rampart that may not be climbed by men, for near the summits only birds of prey live. And beyond the rampart he heard tell that certain spirits were penned.

"All this did I repeat to Otri-pief. Then he asked of me if it was the Golden Horde that dwelt beyond the rampart—for into Muscovy had come tales of the Golden Horde that wanders near the place where the sun rises.

"Is not wine the better for spice—a tale for a little touch of fancy? I embroidered the garment of truth with the gold thread of imagination. I said it was so—the Golden Horde dwelt in a city beyond the rampart.

"Then surely madness smote this lord of the Muscovites, for he said to his companions that he would some day journey to the Mountain of the Eagles."

The young Cossack stared into the crimson eye of the fire and thought that Otrèpiev was not mad. The false Tsar had foreseen the necessity of flight, and had come to a place where the Muscovites could not reach him with vengeance.

"And yet," he muttered, "the girl Nada is not a lying Persian. She told Otrèpiev of a city to be found beyond the mountains."

"Aye," the Persian smiled, no whit cast down by the Cossack's opinion of his people. "Yet she is a flower, a lily from the garden of paradise. Who would weigh her words for the dross of truth?"

Kirdy wondered if Nada had acutally journeyed with her father to this place before now. A search of his memory revealed that Nada had said in Moscow that she had come from the country of the Golden Horde—certainly she spoke the language of these riders of the steppe.

"Hearken, Al-Tâbir," he remarked. "One thing is certain, beyond doubt. We are prisoners in the camp of Tevakel, Khan of the Golden Horde."

The soft mouth of the Persian fell open, and he peered over his shoulders into the shadows of the *kibitka.*

"All things are possible with Allah," he murmured, and then, his brown eyes sparkling, "By the breath of Ali, by the everlasting Imamet—what a tale I shall tell in the courtyards of Fars and Ispahan!"

But the Cossack cared not at all for wonders. He wanted to find out where he was, where Otrèpiev and Nada were, and what their plans might be.

What Al-Tâbir had related simmered down to this: the Golden Horde was the race of tribes that wandered on this side the distant range. The mountains themselves might be called anything, and anything might lie beyond them. Nada had led Otrèpiev on with the tale of a city. Where was she now?

"For what reason," he asked Al-Tâbir abruptly, "didst thou forsake the *chambul* of Otrèpiev?"

"I?" The interpreter of dreams roused reluctantly from imagination that painted him a greater man than Abou Ishak. "I was frightened. A week ago I had gone apart to look for forage. When I turned back to the camp I saw that a strong band of Turkomans had come up and dismounted."

"Turkomans? Here?"

"It is true—may Allah requite me if it is not true! I saw even the brands on their horses, their sheepskin hats. They rode off with my companions and I whipped my horse to the north, away from them."

Only a few years ago Kirdy had been in some bitter fighting against the Turkoman marauders, and he knew that these tribes were justly feared. But their homeland should lie well to the south along the great Syr-Darya.

"Why?" he wondered.

"May they die without offspring! May their bones wither, and their eyes cease to see! The Turkoman dogs be Sunnites—may they bellow in their graves!"

A light dawned on the Cossack, who knew that Sunnite and Shiite—although both zealous Muhammadans—love each other as a wildcat loves a wolf. In the eyes of an orthodox Sunnite, a Persian Shiite is more to be scorned than a *giour*, an unbeliever.

"Within two days, when I wandered without food these un-eyelashed Tatars rode up and seized me, putting me to many indignities—"

"Enough! Sleep—hold thy tongue!"

Kirdy sprang up and seized his fur mantle. When he strode to the door, Al-Tâbir wailed and scrambled forward to clutch his girdle.

"Nay, what dost thou seek? I tell thee, these Tatars are all sons of devils! They look in and poke at me with spears—Their eyes are like cats'—"

Kirdy thrust him aside and threw back the flap, to listen.

"Hearken, Al-Tâbir," he said grimly, "dost thou yearn for Turkomans—a whole horde of Turkomans? Then abide with thy milk and prayers. I must go to Tevakel Khan. Dost thou hear the drums? They are horse drums, and the song they sing is of war."

CHAPTER XIV

THE DRINK OF THE FANGA NIALMA

BECAUSE on the far side of the border dignity rides in a saddle and disgrace walks afoot, Kirdy lingered at the wagon tent until one of his horses was brought. This in itself was little less than a miracle, since the whole plain seemed to be alive with beasts.

The rain had ceased; mist lay in the hollows, and under a murky sky an orange glow spread in the east. Against this light the Cossack made out the dome-like tops of *kibitkas*, the tossing horns of multitudes of cattle, the black shapes of riders. He heard the harsh grunting of camels, the squealing of stallions, the bellowing of bulls, the incessant, plaintive crying of thousands of sheep and unnumbered goats.

His nostrils tingled with the acrid smoke of dung and damp wood fires, the warm breath of trampled grass, and the reek of wet leather. Axles creaked, dogs howled and unseen men shouted. It was a dawn of calamity, as if these inhabitants of the steppe had been driven together by flood or fire. But there was order in the chaos. Near at hand an old woman milked a complaining camel, and out of the nearest herd his black *kabarda* was led up, saddled. Two warriors waited to see what he would do next—two broad and silent men clad in wolfskins, with lacquer helmets topped by a horsetail plume, with a leather drop that came down over their shoulders. Bows and arrows rested in carved wooden cases at their hips, and each held a weapon Kirdy had never seen before.

This weapon was a battle-ax—a four-and-half-foot staff, of ivory or bamboo, with a leather thong that passed around the wrist. The head was long, the cutting edge slightly curved, the butt a steel point.

"*Oucheha keri kari,*" the Cossack said to the Tatars. "It is the dawn, and the drums summon to saddle."

The swift roll of the horse drums had ceased near him, but had been taken up in distant *kibitkas*, and he knew it must be a summons to muster. Knew, too, that it was infinitely better to make this assertion than to ask the question—because uncertainty is cousin to fear, and for a captive to show fear is to invite taunts.

The Tatars regarded him impassively.

"*Ay-a*, the weapon-bearing men ride from the *yurta*."

"Then I must speak with Tevakel Khan."

To a black dome rising out of a cleared space in the encampment they led him, and he loosed the girdle of his sword at the threshold. Older than the blade itself is the tabu against carrying so much as a stick into a tent of the Hordes of high Asia—and not for the khan's herd of ponies would any Tatar have stolen a weapon so left at the entrance.

The dome was of felt, rising on interlashed wattles, and a squadron could have formed beneath it. Within, it was divided by partitions of painted leather into many compartments. By the fire in the central chamber knelt Tevakel Khan on a carpet.

"What gift, O Kazak," he asked, "dost thou bring to the *Altyn Juz?*"

He spoke placidly in the half voice of one who is accustomed to silence in his listeners. An old man, Tevakel Khan, with a thin, good-humored face and brilliant eyes—a straight figure in a horse-hide jacket, the dark mane running down the middle of his back. His embroidered boots had very high red heels and his black satin skull cap was neatly sewn with silver thread.

Considering him, Kirdy judged that he was not to be trifled with—a generous man, indulgent with increasing years, but with authority in his very blood. And the Cossack tried to think of some fitting gift. He had said that he came to the Golden Horde on a mission, and a present would be expected. But he had no gift.

"I bring—"

He was about to say a black *kabarda* stallion, but a glance about the compartment checked him. Behind Tevakel Khan were ranged sandalwood and ebony chests, rolls of splendid carpets and saddles ornamented with silver inlaid on iron. The bowls on the little table from which the chieftain helped himself to dried raisins and tea and millet cake were amber and jade. Tevakel Khan was wealthy—a horse meant little more to the nomad than one of the raisins he selected with such care.

"I bring a sword," he said.

Tevakel Khan looked at him expectantly. The Cossack requested one of the attendants to carry in the curved saber that he had left at the entrance, and he noticed that the Tatar repressed an exclamation of pleasure when he beheld the jeweled hilt and the rich scabbard that the warrior held forth in both hands. Before Tevakel Khan could take it, Kirdy stepped forward and spoke.

"I am Ak Sokol, the White Falcon, and I have come to the *Altyn Juz* from the land of infidels near the setting of the sun."

The Tatar, sipping a bowl of tea, waited in courteous silence.

"The dog of a Shiite," observed one of his household, "said thou wert near at hand on the plain, with two horses. He was fleeing from the Turkomans. Art thou his brother?"

The question was put with thinly veiled contempt, and Kirdy paid it no heed.

"Hearken, O Khan of the *Altyn Juz,*" he went on. "Thy drums beat the summons to saddle. Thy enemies the Turkomans have come up from the southern plain to raid thy herds."

This was a reasonable surmise, and Tevakel Khan made an exclamation of assent. Pin-points of fire glowed in his dark eyes.

"Allah hath caused desire to be born in the heart of Ilbars Sultan of Kwaresmia, the son of Arap Muhammad, lord of Khiva. He thought to find us with our eyes turned the other way, but he has come with a mighty following."

Not long since, Kirdy had waged a long battle against Ilbars Sultan—the Leopard Prince. He had seen the Turkomans wipe out five hundred Don Cossacks, and the memory rankled.

"Ilbars Sultan has a high nose and keen eyes; he would rather slay men than carry off beasts and women. He is shrewd, but the blood lust blinds him."

A faint surprize was apparent in the emotionless Tatar.

"What words are these words, O Kazak? Art thou a *Fanga*—a wizard, to know what passes beyond thy sight?"

"Nay, I have seen the sultan when swords were drawn. I say to thee, O Khan, that he is terrible in battle."

"And is this thy mission—to praise Ilbars Sultan, the thieving dog, to my face?"

"As to that, I speak the truth. Yet I sought the Golden Horde to find therein an enemy. Within the year an oath was sworn that this enemy should die."

Whatever the old khan thought of this he kept to himself. Blood feuds were more to be cherished than religious faith, in the steppe. His eye wandered to the curved sword.

"What is the name of thine enemy, O youth?"

"He was khan of the Muscovites."

"Then he is not to be found within our grazing land. Hearken, Kazak. Some have said to me that thou art a spy, sent in advance by the Turkomans. What are words? I bear thee neither ill will nor good. Give me then the sword and go in peace. I have said!"

Kirdy inclined his head.

"And this is my answer, O Khan! Among my people it is a law of laws that a sword may not pass to another, while the master of it lives. Lacking other gifts, I offer to bear the sword on thy behalf in this battle.

When I have taken spoil, then I will have a gift that is fitting."

A murmur of impatience and anger arose from the listeners around the sides of the room—from the sons and grandsons of the khan, and his officers. They resented the appearance of the stranger at such a time, and more than resented his boldness. Even the quiet old man seemed surprized, but he meditated, his arms folded on his knees.

"Hearken, young warrior, to my second word. The lifetime of a horse before now, the *Altyn Juz* sought pasture in the west. We came to a river, and there found a lame man, a Kazak such as thou, whose only solace in life was a girl-child. Now this Kazak was assuredly a wizard, because the wolf packs came to his *yurta* of nights and he talked with them. We shared bread and salt, he and I, and our talk was as brothers and friends. That was long ago, yet I have seen no Kazak since. Abide, then, with me, but think no more of mounting for battle, lest my men slay thee, unknowing. With Ilbars Sultan is a mighty *Fanga*, and it will go hard with us. Tidings have come—"

With a gesture he dismissed the Cossack and turned to his household, crumpling the millet cakes in his slender fingers. Kirdy smiled as if greatly honored—though his very soul burned with impatience to be free of the tent and in the saddle—and took a seat among the sons of Tevakel Khan.

BUT when he heard the first of the messengers who had been waiting at the entrance, he forgot weariness and disappointment in sudden interest. The Turkomans were within a day's ride of the Tatar camp.

The messengers, who were soaked and weary with riding through the night and the storm, told tales of tent-villages seized by the foe—of old people cut down, warriors burned or crucified or dragged by horses, and young women that died within an hour of capture.

This was no ordinary raid on the part of Ilbars Sultan. The Turkomans, with their allies, the Uzbeks, numbered close to twenty thousand. They had followed the grass up to the north with their horse herds, and they meant to wipe out the armed men of the Golden Horde, to seize the cattle and pasture-land for their own, and to keep the Tatar children for slaves.

In the face of calamity, the patriarch of the Golden Horde remained utterly calm. From the north and the west the Tatar clans were hastening on tired horses to the gathering of the Horde. To Kirdy, it seemed as if Tevakel Khan must give battle within the next two or three days.

If he retreated into the northern steppe he would lose the bulk of his cattle, many horses and all his sheep—and these herds were the very life of the *Altyn Juz*. On the other hand, if he stood his ground against the dreaded Turkomans now, he would be outnumbered.

And if there was a battle, what would become of Otrèpiev and Nada? They were not far away—a Turkoman does not yield up such captives. And, unless the Cossack could free himself from the watch of Tevakel Khan, this battle on the steppe would separate them again, as the black storm drives travelers asunder in the desert.

"In the night before this last the Tourka devils did the two-sword dance in the chieftain's place."

A lad who had crept through the outer patrols of the invaders had just come in to report what he had seen.

"They have many ponies, and a great camp. While the sword dance was going on some of them made a great noise and a flash of fire with weapons they held in their hands, yet no harm came to them."

Tevakel Khan made a gesture of assent. Although the *Altyn Juz* had no firelocks, he had heard of them before.

"What does the *Fanga nialma* of the sultan?"

"He drinks fire."

"A-ah!"

A sibilant moan from the listeners greeted this, and the boy glanced proudly around him, to take full credit for the ominous tidings he brought.

"The wizard drinks fire from a cup, sitting before Ilbars Sultan, the Leopard," he went on. "My eyes beheld this. He sits on a white bearskin."

"A-ah!"

"He has five lesser *fanga*, to wait upon him and increase his magic."

"That is so," put in another, a burly warrior who had carried off the first prisoner from a Turkoman outpost. "The six magicians were found marching toward Ilbars Sultan, out in the steppe. They were clad in red velvets and sables and silver cloth, and their garments were sewn with jewels from skirt to cap."

Kirdy pushed aside the Tatar in front of him, to hear the better.

"*Allahim barabat yik saftir*," murmured Tevakel Khan. "God is just and merciful!" By this he meant that all matters were ordained, and what was happening could not be altered.

"The *Fanga nialma*," went on the warrior, "held in his hand at that time an apple, and the apple was of pure gold. He had changed it to gold."

"What else?"

"Six geese took flight from the grass at the moment when the six *fanga* appeared."

It was apparent to the old Tatar that mighty forces were opposed to him. The marauding Turkomans were evil, but this fellowship of magicians, drinking fire and changing fruit into gold were more to be dreaded. But all at once it seemed to him that his captive, the Cossack, had become possessed of a devil.

Kirdy's dark eyes were blazing and the veins in the forehead stood out. The mention of a cup of fire had aroused his curiosity; the five companions of the wizard had aroused his suspicion, and the gold apple had made him certain of a strange fact. He remembered seeing, in other days, a gold apple among the crown pieces of the Tsars.

"O Khan," he cried, "this *Fanga nialma* is no more than a man, and I have found mine enemy!"

The Tatars shook their heads and whispered gutturally—

"Nay—he is beside himself!"

But Kirdy, on his feet upon the carpet before the khan, seized a bowl of wine and emptied it down his throat. Facing the warrior who had taken a prisoner, he asked—

"Was there not a Kazak woman among the five companions?"

"*Balmëz!* Who knows? Yet, there was a woman dressed as a warrior."

"Aye, so. And this stranger—no hair is on his face?"

"*V'allah!* When did a wizard have hair on his face?"

"Still, I say that I know this man. He is cunning as a steppe fox, and he flees from Frankistan because he has stolen the jewels and garments of a king. I followed him hither."

Tevakel Khan considered and shook his head.

"*Kai*—can a common man drink fire?"

"Aye, so. I can drink fire from a cup. Bring hither my saddle-bags—thou!"

A stir of interest went through the throng in the tent, and the khan signed for the captive's bags to be brought. The White Falcon, he thought, was possessed of a devil, but of what kind of a devil remained to be seen.

Kirdy asked for a small china bowl, and breathed a sigh of relief when he found his leather flask of *gorilka* safe in the bag. There was enough of the white spirits left to almost fill the bowl. Deliberately, he placed it on the carpet before the khan and went to the fire.

With his knife he cut a sliver from a pine stick and lighted it in the fire. He touched the light to the spirits in the cup and a thin, bluish flame danced on the surface of the *gorilka.*

Tevakel Khan rose on his knees to watch the better, and Kirdy lifted the china bowl in both hands. When the Tatars saw the smokeless blue flame, they shivered.

"Glory to God!" said the Cossack, presenting the fire to the four quarters of the winds.

"E-eh!" breathed the watchers.

Tipping the cup toward him, Kirdy drank; but the instant before the spirits touched his lip, he let out his breath, soundlessly. Unseen by the khan, the blue flame flickered out. The young warrior drank down the *gorilka,* and sighed. It was good, and it was his last.

For some moments the old chief remained buried in thought. He thought of the other Cossack who had power over the wolves, and he reached a decision.

"*Kai*—it must be thou art also a *fanga.* A wizard who bears a sword, with hair on his face."

Though Kirdy had not been prepared for this conclusion, he took instant advantage of it.

"Then grant me to ride in the battle. I will seek out this other *fanga* who drinks fire, and destroy him."

The advantages of such an arrangement were apparent to Tevakel Khan and he agreed at once, only demanding that Kirdy remain near him until the fighting began.

CHAPTER XV

> Let your swiftness be that of the wind, your steadiness that of the forest. In raiding and plundering, be like fire, in immovability like a mountain.
>
> Above all, let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, strike like a thunderbolt. MAXIMS OF SUN TZU

WITH the determination of a weasel, Al-Tâbir sought through the Tatar lines the next night for Kirdy. During the day Tevakel Khan had moved up with his clans to a ridge overlooking a long, shallow valley. On the opposite rise Ilbars Sultan was encamped, and Al-Tâbir felt uneasy.

To interpret dreams, to make verses at the courts of kings—that was his work. He was convinced that a prophet had no honor, outside his own country. Because, at every fire he approached, the broad, dark faces of the wild Tatars peered at him suspiciously, and swords and javelins were flourished at his stocky legs. He blundered into a herd of restless cattle and fled to escape the prodding of the long horns. Dogs barked at sight of his kaftan and turban.

So Al-Tâbir was profoundly grateful when he saw one of the Cossack's *kabardas*, saddled by a fire where an ugly warrior in rusty chain-mail squatted, working with whetstone and cloth upon the shining steel head of a battle-ax. This, Al-Tâbir knew, was the man who had taken prisoner the first Turkoman. But Al-Tâbir saw no prisoner, and the skin of his back prickled uncomfortably when he looked at the ax head. This was a fellow of violence, a dealer of blows—an unlearned soul, no fit companion for Jahria ibn Muhammad Al Nisapur, who had written down six hundred true dreams in a book.

When the Tatar—Arslan by name—merely lifted the corner of a thin lip at sight of the Persian, Al-Tâbir decided it would be safe for him to stay by the fire.

When Kirdy strode up Arslan raised a knotted hand to his forehead and lips, but Al-Tâbir gave tongue joyously.

"*Ai-ee*, young hero—prince of swordsmen—my deliverer! Let us sit upon the carpet of counsel and take thought for the morrow."

"How, take thought?" demanded Kirdy, whose mind was on other matters.

"Where shall I place myself in order—in order to see all that passes without molestation? I will make a song of thy deeds. But, to see everything clearly I should be as a disembodied spirit, remote from these savages. When I seek the outer lines these unclean dogs drive me back. When the battle begins shall I go to the standard?"

"Aye—a good place. The sword strokes will fall heavily there!"

Al-Tâbir squirmed, and caressed his ample girdle.

"That is not what I want. To see the battle as a whole, perhaps the horse lines would be the best."

"Nay," Kirdy pointed out indifferently. "The herds are behind the ridge. Besides, the Turkomans usually sweep around an enemy—you would be trampled."

"Ah, the Turkomans. They be worse than these snouted pagans, because they cut innocent people open, just to see them quiver. O the sons of nameless fathers! O that I were again in the hill gardens of Rudbar, where men have ears to listen and hearts to feel!"

But Kirdy was listening to guttural monosyllables from Arslan, and now he sprang to his feet and seized the rein of the *kabarda*.

"Eh—what has come to pass? Whither goest thou? We have made no plans—" Al-Tâbir was alarmed by this activity.

"The Turkomans have thrown a head into our lines. It was the head of Sorgai, a grandson of the khan, who rode out recklessly beyond his men, before our coming. Now Tevakel Khan is raging like a devil."

"Let him rage. Why should we go near him—"

But Kirdy was in the saddle, and Al-Tâbir, intent on keeping his only friend within call, clung to the stirrup, heedless of the *kabarda's* snorting as he trotted through the groups of warriors up to the mound where the patriarch sat surrounded by his officers.

The mound was in darkness because Tevakel Khan did not wish his foes to see his anger. A musket-shot away the camp of the raiders was in plain sight, for the Turkomans were enjoying themselves after their fashion.

They had set up lofty stakes to the top of which they hung captives—women as well as men by the feet. Warriors with torches were lighting the heads of the unfortunates. Archers were shooting shafts into the struggling and smoking bodies and the hoarse shouting of the wild tribesmen could be clearly heard. It was answered by a groan from Al-Tâbir.

Stacked by the Turkoman tents were piles of plunder—rugs, weapons and shining silver. Lean warriors, wrapped in grotesque finery, nankeens and furs and silk taken from the Tatars, stalked about in full view, while others roasted whole sides of mutton and beef over fires fed by broken tent furniture and wagons.

At times other men were visible, dripping red from head to boots, with stained knives in their hands—and Al-Tâbir wondered whether these had come from the butchery of beasts or captives. Wild cries and the roaring of flames, drifting smoke and the flash of bright blades in the sword dance—all this filled him with a dread of the morrow.

He looked at Tevakel Khan and shivered. The old man was grinding his teeth and clutching at his head, muttering.

"*Tzaktyr—kiari.* Burn—slay!"

Tevakel Khan had seen the blood of his grandson and the torture of his people, and for him there was neither rest nor sleep until he could take his sword in his hand and go against the invaders. But Kirdy, squatting at his side and paying no heed to the nudging of Al-Tâbir, scanned the extent of the Turkoman camp with experienced eyes and weighed chances. Before long the fires would die out and then nothing could be seen.

The Cossack frowned. By dawn the Turkomans would be in the saddle, their best mounted men on the wings; they would circle the smaller array of the Tatars, making play with their long firelocks—Kirdy knew well how they fought, leaping in and slashing like wolves.

"Attack now!" he said under his breath.

The old man turned to peer into his eyes.

"What was thy word?"

"Attack now."

"*Kai*—it is dark. Yonder jackals snarl over their meat. That was the word of a traitor!"

"I have been asleep. Now my eyes are open. I see a way into the camp of the Turkomans." Kirdy spoke with utter assurance, knowing that, for a moment, life and death weighed in the balance. "After I drank the fire I slept, and the spirits of high and distant places came before me."

The Cossack was certain of three things: In darkness the crude firelocks of the Turkomans would be of less service than the Tatars' bows; also, for a reason he had never fathomed, the Moslems of the south were reluctant to give battle at night. Also, if Tevakel Khan waited for dawn and the onset of the sultan, he would fare badly.

Tevakel Khan breathed deeply and ceased to snarl. He was aged and far from timid, and he was thinking that in the hours of night the power of the *fanga* increased greatly.

"Then, say!" he urged.

Kirdy was already shaping a plan in his mind.

"By fire, by the cattle herd, and by fear the Turkoman can be broken like a dry reed."

"I will make a whip from his hide—I will make a drinking cup from his skull."

"Aye, so. Now hearken, Tevakel Khan, to the plan."

Mindful of possible listeners, the Cossack leaned close to the chieftain and whispered. When he had done, the Tatar sat like a graven image, blinking at the distant camp fires. The shadowy figures of his men crept closer, to hear what he would say.

"God is just and merciful!" he ejaculated at last. "*Yalou boumbi*—mount your horses. Bring my shield and my horse. We shall go against the long-haired dogs."

"What has happened?" Al-Tâbir caught the flash of exultation in the Cossack's dark face. "Will we fly? That is good!"

"Nay, we draw the saber and cast away the scabbard. And that is best of all."

Now the interpreter of dreams did not lack cleverness. The set lips and blazing eyes of the young Cossack told him that it would be useless to protest; and he had found out that it was worse than useless to try to sneak out of the camp. So he pretended to be pleased and asked for a weapon, saying that he would ride between Kirdy and Arslan. It seemed to him that in the company of such redoubtable warriors a man of peace and learning would be safer than elsewhere.

"Good!" cried Kirdy. "Then wilt thou point out to me the traitor Otrèpiev; but I myself shall find Nada."

IT SEEMED to the agitated Al-Tâbir that every one went mad that night, including himself. Dour Arslan gave him a javelin and a short bow with a wooden quiver of arrows and watched the Persian's efforts to string the powerful bow with quiet amusement. Then they mounted and the night was full of sound.

A fitful wind had sprung up in the last hours, whipping through the tall grass, and muffling the thudding hoofs of unseen horses, the creaking of leather, the rattle of arrows in quivers. Masses of riders moved past Al-Tâbir, and the Persian tried to keep his teeth from chattering as he rode after the Cossack. He followed Kirdy back at last to the cattle herd—that had been picked up on the last day's march, and hurried in by Tatars who sought refuge from the sultan's pillagers. There were more than a thousand of the beasts.

And Al-Tâbir rubbed his eyes. Behind the restless herd he could make out dozens of new camp-fires, and beyond them a solid mass of warriors drawn up around the ox-tail standard of Tevakel Khan. He had left such a mass, out on the left of the herd, and from riders that came and went past the fires, he judged that there was another third on the right.

Only the front of the herd was cleared of horsemen. Here was the black mass of the slope that hid the Turkoman camp from view.

"What is that?" Al-Tâbir started and gripped his javelin, bow and reins all at once. His gray pony pricked up its ears.

"The Turkomans are loosing off their matchlocks," Kirdy grunted. "It is the end of the sword-dance."

But Al-Tâbir was staring, fascinated, at the herd. Scores of gnome-like Tatars were at work there, and he heard a strange clattering and stamping that grew louder. Warriors ran up with bundles of reeds and brush and others fashioned torches at the fires behind the mass of cattle. Then the torches began to flicker in and out of the herd.

"*Ai-ee!*" he cried. "The horns of the beasts are burning!"

It did not occur to him that the Tatars had been binding brush on the horns of a great part of the steers. He saw several of the Tatars trampled underfoot, and the blaze caught from one beast to another in the close packed, milling mass.

Then, to Al-Tâbir's thinking, all the devils of the night swooped down. The herd started to run away from the camp-fires, and the Tatars around Kirdy howled and roared at it on their wing, so that the leaders plunged down the wind, over the knoll and toward the Turkoman camp.

The bellowing of the beasts, the snorting of the frantic horses, the whining of the wind —all this swept Al-Tâbir along, close at Kirdy's stirrup. In the depression between the camps, the steers spread out, but ceased not their maddened rush as hot embers fell on them.

Rushing to the summit of their slope, the Turkomans beheld the herd with its blazing horns. Their patrols tried to turn it, but that herd could not be turned. Then the Turkomans ran for their horses.

Thundering across the depression and up the slight slope, the cattle burst past the watch-fires and scattered among the tents, the carts, the piles of plunder of the raiders. Firelocks barked at them, and arrows began to flicker into them, but the mass of them surged over the tents—crashed head-on into wagons, rubbed blazing horns against flimsy felt. And in another moment flames fanned by the rushing wind began to spring up all over the encampment.

To the best of Al-Tâbir's belief madness had given way to chaos, and he wondered into which of the seven hells of Moslem purgatory he had been plunged.

The "*Ghar—ghar—ghar!*" of the eager Tatars mingled with the "*Allah-hai!*" of the rallying Turkomans. Al-Tâbir was still between Kirdy and Arslan, galloping through lines of tents and dodging frantic steers. He saw two warriors on shaggy ponies—two men with gleaming swords and bare, shaven heads. Prudently he pulled in his horse, and watched the Cossack spur forward, parrying a slash of a Turkoman simitar and slipping his blade into the throat of the shouting warrior as he passed.

Arslan rose in his short stirrups, swinging the long battle-ax. The Turkoman who opposed him threw up his sword to guard his head. But the heavy ax smote through the guard and split open the man's forehead.

"*Nent-en!*" Kirdy cried. "Forward!"

They turned aside, bending low in the saddle to keep under the whistling shafts that flew from the shadows where men gathered. Their ponies leaped a tangle of bodies and flew up a clear slope toward the green standard of the sultan. Here the wind howled at them and eddies of smoke twined around them, as if to draw them onward.

A firelock roared and flashed, and Arslan's pony sank, head down, at the crest of the knoll. But Kirdy, who had caught sight of Nada, rode on at a free gallop, his sword arm swinging at his knee.

The girl still wore her Cossack dress and hat—for despite Otrèpiev's authority—no woman of such beauty would have been safe in that camp. She was in the saddle of the bay stallion, without her *yataghan*, and the stallion's rein was held by two men, also mounted—companions of Otrèpiev.

One let fall the rein and rode at Kirdy. He was a young warrior, with thin, cold features, and his apparel was that of a Polish noble, a black velvet *kontash* thrown over silvered breastplate, a gilded eagle on his light shield. His horse was a splendid gray mare.

Kirdy tightened his rein and swerved to bring the Pole to his right side; but the other—a skilled horseman—darted in and slashed at his head.

The sabers clashed and parted, and before the young noble could turn his mare the Cossack had whirled his black *kabarda* and crashed into him. The Pole kept his seat in the saddle by a miracle, but his sword wrist was gripped by steel fingers. "Yield!" Kirdy demanded.

At the same instant both heard the flurry of hoofs behind them. The man who had remained at Nada's side was a Circassian, a follower of Otrèpiev, and not inclined to let slip an opportunity to use his weapon. Swinging his *yataghan* over his head, he darted at the Cossack's back.

"Guard yourself—White Falcon!" Nada shouted, her clear voice cutting through the uproar as a bell pierces the mutter of a throng.

Kirdy had no time to do that. He caught a glimpse of the lean Moslem, and the gleam of steel—and he swung himself out of the saddle.

"*Hai!*" The Circassian shouted once in triumph and again in anger, because his sweeping slash had met only air. The impetus of his rush carried him past and before he could wheel Kirdy, who had kept his left foot in the stirrup, had thrust the Pole away and was in the saddle again.

But—though his grip had numbed the young noble's right wrist—the Pole had plucked a dagger from his belt with his free hand, and the short blade slashed the Cossack's ribs. Feeling the bite of the steel, Kirdy smashed the hilt of his saber into the Pole's face. Both men reeled, but it was the Pole who fell, the Cossack who tightened his knees and groped for his rein with a numbed arm. And upon him all the fury of the Circassian descended.

The Moslem came on warily this time, and once his twisted blade cut Kirdy's forearm. Squatting in short stirrups, his long teeth bared, his dark eyes gleaming, he edged his horse closer, seeking to thrust under his foeman's guard with the shorter weapon.

And now Kirdy swayed in the saddle, his saber sliding off the *yataghan*.

"*Hai!*" cried the Circassian, and thrust.

But the Cossack, who had been watching for this, was not as weak as he seemed. The curved saber slashed down, and before the Moslem could recover, Kirdy had cut him through the temple so that the steel grated on bone and he had to strain to draw it free. So convulsively had the man gripped with rein and knees when he was struck, he remained for a moment crouching in the saddle—until his frantic horse, rearing, flung him to earth, a lifeless body.

Then Kirdy turned to look for the other. Instead, he saw Arslan climbing into the saddle of the mare, and a glance at the splendid figure in breastplate and *kontash* showed him that Arslan had slain the owner before catching the horse.

"Dismount!" he heard Nada's voice. "Let me see your hurt."

Kirdy shook his head.

"It was a trick. I can ride."

The girl, in her dark *svitka* and hat, looked slender and pale as if she had been wasted by sickness, and in the glare of the flames Kirdy wondered if this were indeed the Nada he had left at the Wolf's Throat, or some apparition that had taken form out of the steppe. He leaned forward to peer into her eyes, and the sight of her beauty warmed his blood like the rarest of wines.

"My *yataghcn*," she begged at once. "The dog of a Circassian took it."

Kirdy bade Arslan retrieve the weapon and its sheath, but when Nada took it in her hand, she shivered.

"There is blood—your blood upon it."

"Wipe the blade," Kirdy ordered the Tatar harshly, and Arslan did so, on the end of the slain Moslem's turban.

"Nay," cried the girl. "It is an omen of death."

And she looked at the young warrior steadfastly, as if she feared some power might, even at that moment, carry him from her side.

"Then take me to Otrèpiev!" he responded gruffly, because of the pain of the wound in his side.

And at that she flung up her head, her eyes blazing.

"Am I a spy? Nay, seek him among the hordes!"

But Kirdy, leaning on his saddle horn, looked down into the tumult of battle. In that eddying of horsemen and maddened cattle and fire, no one could be found. He thought that if Otrèpiev lived he would return to the knoll where the standard had been, to seek Nada.

Only Arslan—diligently stripping the slain of weapons—was near them. The Turkomans who had held the knoll had ridden off when the main body of Tatars came up—in fact the standard of Ilbars Sultan was nowhere to be seen. Kirdy noticed a long cart near one of the tents and rode over to it, Nada trotting beside him.

It was not a Tatar wagon, and narrow iron runners were strapped to the sides. Perched on the fur packs that burdened it was a Muscovite saddle.

"Aye," laughed Nada, reading his face. "That is the *kibitka* of Otrèpiev. In it he keeps his treasure. Look and see!"

But Kirdy summoned Arslan and bade him take stand by the wagon and allow no one to carry off what was in it.

"I give thee this as a duty."

And the Tatar came, swinging his ax, looking like a bear girdled with steel. He had everything from knives to breastplates hung to his belt.

"If this be truly the wagon of the *Fanga nialma*," he grunted, "he himself will have a word to say in the matter because he is riding like a devil to this place—now."

Before he had finished speaking Kirdy was off and Nada with him. At the crest of the knoll the girl drew in her breath sharply.

"You are wounded. Do not go against him!"

Four horsemen were approaching the mound at full gallop. Two were Muscovite *boyare* in armor, wearing rich cloaks, fur-edged. The man who rode in advance of the pair drew Kirdy's eyes instantly.

Beneath a silvered casque with a crest of eagle feathers, a broad, dark face was visible. High cheek bones, thin, restless eyes, and a sure seat in the saddle—all these bespoke power. And there was power in the body of Otrèpiev, and tranquillity in his spirit, because he rode through chaos as if he were a king reviewing a host. Even his horse, a big-boned black, swept on with an easy gait. And, seeing Nada, Otrèpiev turned to fling a jest at his followers. Rising in his stirrups, he saluted her with a blood-stained sword.

Then he peered at Kirdy, who was urging his *kabarda* down the slope.

At this instant, as quail dart from a thicket, a bevy of dwarf Tatars came out of the shadows and bore down on Otrèpiev, who turned his horse to meet them.

"*Yarou manda!*" Kirdy shouted at them, fearing that they might reach his foe before he did. But the Muscovites fired two pistols, and when one of the Tatars fell from the saddle, the others cried out in anger and closed in upon the four riders.

Horses reared, and blades flashed up. The shrill cry of the nomads mingled with the screamed oaths of the Muscovites. Steel clattered. One of Otrèpiev's followers went down, and Kirdy, plunging into the mêlée, saw the false Dmitri split the skull of a warrior. With all the impetus of the rush down the slope the Cossack's horse struck one of the Tatar ponies, and was jarred back to his haunches, Kirdy keeping his seat with an effort.

When he looked up, Otrèpiev had wheeled away, followed by only one man. The Tatars were springing from their saddles to snatch plunder from the two others, who were struggling weakly on the ground. Kirdy set his teeth and made after Otrèpiev, who had a bow-shot's start. Through a deserted part of the camp they galloped, beyond the glow of fire into the darkness of the plain.

"Stay!" Kirdy called angrily. "Will you fly from one?"

Out of the murk the voice of Otrèpiev answered him:

"'Tis my hour for the road—for the long road to Satan. Follow if you will!"

Glancing over his shoulder Kirdy made out another rider at his heels, and, outlined against the distant glow of fire, the gnome-like figures of Tatars, casting about for the fleeing. Follow he did, with the *kabarda* going lame.

For the first time he lashed the black racer madly, and the horse gathered himself together to plunge ahead into the rush of wind. The wind had a chill bite to it; the stars were hidden and rain pelted down as Kirdy, following the distant hoof beats, swerved into a gully.

His horse stumbled and recovered with a long stagger and clatter of hoofs. Again Kirdy lashed him, but again he stumbled heavily. They dipped down into a nest of boulders, and when Kirdy reined in the done-up horse he could hear nothing of the men in front of him—only the rider coming up behind, who proved to be Nada.

Mustering what strength was left him after sleepless days and loss of blood, the Cossack caught her rein and spoke hoarsely.

"Unharmed he goes upon the road to Satan. And what road will you follow?"

"I will stay with you."

Kirdy could see nothing at all, and the beat of the rain was like sword strokes on his bare head. With the rein of the *kabarda* over his arm, he staggered toward the rocky side of the gully, to seek for shelter. Once he felt Nada catch his arm.

Stumbling forward, he tried to feel out the way. Though his legs still carried him, he was half unconscious. Then he became aware that he was in a dry place—a shallow cavern, he thought. He heard the heavy breathing of the horses, the light step of Nada. Flinging himself down, he fell asleep at once.

The girl had taken the warrior's head in her lap, and with the long tresses of hair that had been kept dry under the sheepskin hat she rubbed the water and blood from his face. Because she also was weary and—for the first time in months—happy, she wept.

CHAPTER XVI

CONCERNING TEVAKEL KHAN

ARSLAN the ax-man sat on the saddle atop the treasure wagon of the vanished wizard and related over and over again the tale of what he had seen. This he did to establish his own worth and importance, but also to keep intact the contents of the wagon.

It had been placed upon him as a duty to preserve this spoil for the Cossack, and being no more than one man Arslan knew that guile must come to the aid of his ax, if he was to ward greedy hands from the bundles and chests that he sat on.

With the gold-embroidered *kontash* of the dead Pole wrapped around him, and the body of the Pole to point to, in evidence of his tale, he held forth:

"*Hai*—in this fashion it was. We had slain many of the Turkoman wolves—the Kazak *Fanga* and I. We twain rode up this *bogh*, to where the standard was to be seen. In this place as you may see, I slew the Frank, splitting his skull. Then out of the darkness appeared the woman dressed as a man and the Kazak bade me wipe clean a light sword and bestow it upon her. It was a good sword, though light. Then the twain rode to look at this wagon which contains the magic of the *Fanga nialma*.

"No sooner had they touched the *kibitka* than the *Fanga nialma* came toward us, with a white pelt swinging from his shoulders and his horse snorting fire. The Kazak *Fanga* shouted and reined at him, swinging the enchanted sword that cuts through iron or leather. If there were not magic in the sword, how else would it cut as it does?

"Then, behold, the *Fanga nialma* fled for his life. But he cried out to the spirits of the upper air, and rain came, to be a veil in covering his flight. He vanished like a rat in a wheat field, and the Kazak also vanished; but by the gods of the high places, my brothers, it is not well to touch this *kibitka*. I, who have permission, may sit in this saddle thus. Now, my brothers, bring me mare's milk and the fat tail of a sheep from a full pot."

After a time came Tevakel Khan with two sons, to look at the wizard's wagon. Though they yearned to investigate, after hearing Arslan's tale they decided not to do so until all the rest of the spoil of the Turkoman camp was safely garnered.

The Turkoman wolves had been slashed and driven. The fighting eddied over the plain, as scattered wind gusts follow a hurricane. And the Tatars pursued like ferrets—for this was the kind of fighting they relished.

The Horde had been thinned under the dreaded swords of the invaders, but the greater part of the Turkomans lay headless in the high, wet grass. Their heads were piled into pyramids, about which vultures and crows flapped and stalked. The men of the Golden Horde cared not for slaves, and they had seen their women hung by the feet and burned the night before.

The younger warriors were still in the

saddle, harrying the groups of the flying, when, at mid-afternoon, Kirdy and Nada rode in on lame horses, and Arslan gave up his charge.

No sooner had the Cossack dismounted than word of his arrival was carried to Tevakel Khan. A carpet was placed near the wagon and upon this the old chieftain knelt, while his surviving sons gathered behind him. Gravely he acknowledged Kirdy's salute, and without expression, he stared at Nada, evidently believing her a captive.

"The fate of man is in God's hands," he intoned, and added: "Hast thou slain the wizard of Ilbars Sultan?"

"Nay—he has escaped to the east."

"Doubtless taking the form of a serpent or a rat," nodded the khan, who was familiar with the evasiveness of wizards. "Yet this, his *kibitka*, is in thy hands. Thou hast, too, his woman. But let us see what is in the sacks."

Many and varied were the tales that had sprung up among the Horde of the splendor and the daring of the departed wizard, and—though he gave no sign of it—Tevakel Khan was afflicted with all the curiosity of a child.

First the saddle was brought to the chieftain for inspection, then kegs of powder, which he recognized and distrusted. He believed that firelocks were uncanny, and since the firelocks of the Turkomans had done them little good, he decided to sprinkle the powder on the earth, where it could do no harm.

A pair of flutes pleased him immensely, and rich garments and jars of rum and brandy likewise. But when Kirdy broke open a small chest and showed him strings of pearls, the notorious gold apple, the gold staff with jeweled tip, and rubies and diamonds of great size and luster, he fell into meditation.

"Aforetime," Kirdy reminded him, "I made pledge that from the spoil of this camp a gift should be found for thee—a fitting gift. Take then, these precious stones, for they are part of a royal treasure."

Again the old man scrutinized each flaming ruby—torn from more massive settings—and the blue and yellow diamonds that must have come from Persia.

"Allah!" he grunted. "Of what worth are these? The garments I shall wear, and the wines shall be drunk from the skull-cup of Ilbars Sultan. But these will not keep out the cold or warm the blood."

"They are thine. Do with them as thou wilt."

"They brought no good to the *Fanga nialma*. Such things work evil. I have seen it. I have goods enough. From the earth they came, and I shall have them buried, and a horse slain upon the spot as an offering to the spirits of the high places."

Kirdy glanced at Nada, who was fingering the stones, curiously.

"The khan will bury them," he said. "Will you not keep some?"

The girl smiled, and then shook her head.

"Nay, White Falcon—they were stolen, and what would they avail us, here?"

Now the jewels were the last of the things of the false Tsar—and Kirdy thought that he must have carried them from the palace the day before his flight from Moscow, sending them ahead in the sledge. Such articles as these might have been carried out under one of the immense coats of the Muscovites, and Otrèpiev had counted on changing them into money when his journey had ended. And Kirdy wondered, while he waited for the khan to acknowledge his gift, whether Otrèpiev had turned back through the shambles of the camp to seek Nada or these precious stones.

"Eh," said Tevakel Khan, "now come ye to my *yurta* and make choice of whatever thing thou desirest."

A Tatar is avaricious where presents are concerned, but it is a matter of personal honor with him that the giver be rewarded. So he was surprized and not too well pleased when the Cossack said he would take only fresh horses and a man to show him the way.

"Whither?"

"Only the eagles know. I go upon the trail of my enemy, the *Fanga nialma*."

Considering this, the khan shook his head moodily.

"Thou art bold, O Kazak. Thou art terrible in battle, as a man should be. Thou hast a golden-haired slave, and here in the Horde there is a place for thee, at the right of the fire. What more will a journey bring thee?"

"Vengeance."

"For death?"

"For the deaths of ten thousand, and the broken promise of a traitor."

The old chieftain made a gesture as of casting a stick upon a fire.

"With the slayer of his kin a man may

not sleep under the same sky. Bind thy wounds, that they do not open—choose from my herd what pleases thee, and go. Yet if thy rein is drawn again to the *Altyn Juz*, the place on the white horseskin of my *yurta* is open. I have said it, and my word is not smoke."

Aware that this was a favorable moment to leave, and that the good nature of the old man might not last, Kirdy placed his hand to his forehead and lips.

"And the woman!" Tevakel Khan observed suddenly. "What is to be done with her?"

"She desires to go with me."

"Then thy peace will be troubled, because she came from the camp of thine enemy. It would be better to slay her with thy sword—thus!"

He moved the simitar that lay across his knees significantly.

"Nay, she is a Kazak, and her father is the master of the wolves, thy friend."

"Allah!"

Tevakel Khan considered Nada, and thought that here was a matter of wonder. It seemed to him that this feud was no ordinary pursuit of blood, but a struggle of wizardry. He chose rather to hear the ending of it than to have a share in it himself, and he gave Kirdy leave to go.

When the wounded Cossack and the young girl walked away through the charred camp, the sun was near setting, and the red light brought to the mind of Tevakel Khan another matter, most vital. His faded eyes gleamed, the wrinkles in his broad face deepened, and he bade his sons bring to him the Uighur scholar who did his writing.

When the native was seated at his feet, thin brush and paper roll in hand, the master of the Goden Horde began speaking.

"Write thus! To Arap Muhammad Khan of Khiva, lord of dead wolves and king of grave-jackals, greeting from his foe Tevakel Khan of the *Altyn Juz!*

"Understand that upon this day, the fifth of the month of the Ox, I mounted and rode against thy camp and thy son Ilbars Sultan and thy warriors, sword in hand.

"Thou couldst not see the flames devour thy tents, thy heroes overthrown and trampled, their heads piled into heaps.

"Thou couldst not see thy wise men and wizards fleeing like sheep, brother parting from brother—thy horses taken by my grandchildren, thy weapons cast before my tent pole, thy standard the plaything of girl-children—nor the skull of thy son Ilbars Sultan that was, a drinking cup ready to my hand.

"Since all these things thou couldst not see, and since not a man of thine hath escaped to bear thee the tale, I, Tevakel Khan—I tell it thee!"

This was the Tatar's valedictory to the hated Turkoman, and when he had satisfied himself that Al-Tâbir did not understand the Uighur script, Tevakel Khan gave the writing to the interpreter of dreams to bear to Khiva, instructing several of his warriors to accompany the Persian as far as the first outposts of the Turkomans.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GATE IN THE MOUNTAIN

IT WAS several days later that Kirdy and Nada camped near a Tatar cemetery—a place of gray, moss-coated rocks, and dense rushes—and listened to a harangue by Arslan, the axman, who had offered to accompany them. A half dozen rough-coated ponies grazed outside the firelight, with the bay stallion that the girl had kept. Their packs now held little except meat and salt and Arslan's cooking implements, and furs.

Squatting at a little distance from them, the Tatar spoke gravely, his hideous face outlined by the glow of the fire against the loom of a rock.

"*Kai*, it is so. Here the grazing land ends and the *tayga*, the thick forest begins. After the rains, it was a small matter to follow the trace of thy enemy; but in the forest a trail is lost if it be three or four days old."

Kirdy merely nodded, and Nada, lying outstretched on a bed of moss, hands clasped behind her head, looked only at the canopy of stars that seemed nearer now they had left the mists of the plain behind. Arslan peered at his master uneasily.

"Thou hast seen. Once, in the first day thine enemy sought to turn west. He fell in with riders going to the camp of the khan. They knew him not. They sold him a sheep and perhaps other things. As far beyond this spot as a man can see, thine enemy the *Fanga* dismounted. His companion cooked part of the sheep. The horses rolled and grazed.

"For a while they watched from a high place, doubtless seeing others of my people. So they knew no path was open to them toward the setting sun. They turned then to the rising sun.

"Now they ride toward the Mountains of the Eagles, and through these mountains they mean to go."

Kirdy looked up.

"How knowest thou?"

"If a buffalo makes for a ford does it not mean to cross the stream? It is so! These twain have drawn their reins toward a gut in the range. They will go through."

"Is there a way?"

The ax-man rubbed his knees and looked everywhere but into the Cossack's eyes.

"There is a way."

"Can this *Fanga* find it without a guide?"

Arslan grinned.

"Nay, Kazak, hath he not a guide? One who knows all the ways of the earth?"

"Who, then?"

"Shaitan, who sits atop yonder rampart. He beckons the rider and surely the gate is open when the Yakka Shaitan, the Lord of the Night, beckons."

The Cossack grunted and tried another tack. Arslan had spoken of the snow range not as mountains but as a rampart, which implied a citadel or fortified place somewhere above them.

"Is the gate barred?"

"Is the pass to the wolf's gully barred to the lamb? Nay, the pass is open."

"What pass?"

Arslan waved a scarred hand impatiently.

"Yonder pass, high—high. There the eagles and the vultures sit and wait. Fools may go through the pass to the other side. Yet the eagles are wiser. They sit and wait for food."

"Beyond the pass, is there a fortified place?"

"Ask the kites! They know, and we—we do not know. Only at one time there was a city beyond the rampart. It was the city of the Golden Horde."

"And now?"

"It is a *kuran tengri*—a place accursed. In three lifetimes no man of the Horde has crossed to the side of the rampart where the sun rises."

And that was all Arslan would say. Considering his words, Kirdy saw a little light. To the Tatars all lofty peaks are traditionally sacred—they went to a mountain summit to pray, and ran away if a storm came up. The snow range that was now clearly visible, even in the starlight, was a natural barrier. That Arslan and his fellows should be superstitious about the Mountains of the Eagles was to be expected.

Now Arslan had used the words *kuran tengri* to describe what lay beyond the pass above them. This meant a forbidden or haunted spot, but a place of spirits as well. Such a name usually, the Cossack remembered, had a cause.

If there were indeed a city beyond the pass, it might be a city where the Horde had met with calamity in almost forgotten days. If so, the Tatars would naturally avoid the site. Asia has its lost cities where once devastating sand or plague has entered in—or an invading horde. Time would have erased the memory of calamity, though not the dread of the place.

So much Kirdy knew. And this would account for the tale of the Persian, that the mountain rampart was unscalable, and that beyond it the sun came up. Yet Al-Tâbir had also said that Nada knew of a city on the far side of the range, and had told Otrèpiev of it. He looked at the silent girl.

"Nada, why did you send Otrèpiev to chase shadows? Who knows the country beyond these mountains?"

"*Ai-a*, White Falcon!" She stretched slender arms toward the stars, and turned on her side to smile at him. "Am I a vampire, to lead men from the trail and slay them? I spoke the truth."

She watched Arslan replenish the fire and go off to the ponies.

"The ax-man is troubled. I think he is afraid. And you—you are like all men. When your enemy escapes you turn to me with a black brow and say, 'Why did'st thou in this fashion?' Long ago my father wandered in the steppe and crossed the path of this Horde. And the mother of Tevakel Khan liked me and told me many tales—of a city that had once belonged to the Horde. I told her of Moscow, and she swore that this *kuran tengri* was more splendid than that, with higher walls. They who entered this city found peace. And that, surely, is greater than Moscow. I think the hag wanted to steal me, but Tevakel Khan forbade."

"Arslan says that Otrèpiev is heading for the pass that leads to this place."

Drowsily, Nada nodded, resting her head on her arm.

"Aye, my Falcon, and if he finds a city and a strange people, he will make himself master of them, as he did of the Muscovites. When the Turkoman riders were seen coming toward us on the plain, he robed his followers in rich coats and sables and took the scepter in his hand, greeting the dog-thieves as servants come to his aid."

She laughed delightedly.

"*Kai*, so it happened they were astonished and a little afraid—when six wild geese flew up from the grass at their coming. I saw it. Luck played into the hand of Gregory Otrèpiev, but his boldness saved my life."

Now she glanced fleetingly at the silent Cossack.

"O White Falcon, I made him a promise that if he should make himself king of the people beyond the mountain I would then bend the head to him and sit at his feet as queen."

"That was ill said."

From beneath long lashes dark eyes took stock of the young warrior and his growing anger. Nada fairly purred.

" 'Why did'st thou in this fashion?' So the Cossack says in his heart, being blind as a wounded ox. Have you tamed me, Cossack? Have you bound my tongue?"

"It was ill done, to send Otrèpiev astray!"

This seemed to please her the more.

"Ill done! It was his fate that he should go! A new kingdom to be conquered! What if he had but one man to ride at his heel, his treasure lost, his courtiers slain? The rampart is high—the more reason to climb it; the city beyond is unknown—so he went to find it. That is his way. Besides," she added tranquilly, "where else could he go? You have seen and Arslan has growled it out, that only the mountain pass was open to him."

"Nay, yours was the spur that sent him forward."

"True! How much better for him if he had lingered at that first camp, eating mutton until you came, with your sword, on a Tatar's pony—"

Kirdy winced, because the diminutive beasts of the Golden Horde were ill-suited to his height, and Nada, secure on the great limbed charger had pointed this out more than once.

"—and cut him to pieces," the girl concluded pleasantly. "As it is, he goes free into the unknown."

"You led him across the dry lands—"

"Should I leave him for the kites? Nay, he could never have found the way. And you blame me for that?"

Now in his heart Kirdy had no blame for any act of the girl; a blind rage was seizing him. Al-Tâbir had said that Nada had joined the company of Otrèpiev because she knew that, sooner or later, Kirdy would come up with them. Rage whispered that Al-Tâbir lied, to curry favor—that Nada loved the false Tsar and the glitter of his deeds. Jealousy whispered that Nada was now riding at his side, not because she wished to be with him, but because she sought to lead him astray from his pursuit.

And in this moment Nada's mood changed, as a leaf blown by the wind whirls and rushes back upon the gust. Her long eyes, intent on the fire, grew troubled and she put her hand lightly on the Cossack's arm. Under her fingers the man's muscles were like iron, and he did not dare look at her, for the anger in him.

"Kirdy," she said after a moment, "look!"

She pointed up, beyond the dark network of the forest, to the wall of darkness that was the bare, rocky heights above the timber line. Out of this black wall rose at intervals the snow peaks, gleaming in the clear starlight. To the girl—as well as to Arslan—they resembled watch towers built upon a wall of sheer immensity.

"Tevakel Khan is old and wise," she whispered. "Do as he counseled. Go back to the Horde. Your wounds have not closed; there is fever in you."

Now he looked at her, with burning eyes, his lips set upon clenched teeth. And she frowned and tried to shake his arm.

"Go back, Kirdy. You did not hear the tale of the wife of Tevakel Khan. Only now—" she hesitated, then, "I fear that Gregory Otrèpiev will indeed be master of the country beyond, and blood will fall between us—yours or mine."

Once Kirdy laughed and at the sound of it she drew back, lips parted.

"Remember the omen of the *yataghan*. Your blood was on it when it was given me."

But the Cossack rose suddenly to his feet, and cupped his hands about his eyes to peer at the heights.

"Kirdy," Nada went on impulsively, "let

Otrèpiev meet his fate, wherever he has gone. He will not return. I fear, for us."

"Nada," he said slowly, "there is no fear in you. Your beauty is such that you command and men obey, like slaves. It burns, this fever."

His hands clenched, and his arms flung out so that bones and sinews cracked.

"That is the way of it! Your thoughts are bent on this traitor, because he has played the part of a king. What thought have you for the Falcon, the Cossack? He serves to protect you—to groom your horse—to bring wood for your fire. When the wolves howl, the borzoi is caressed by his mistress; when the sun shines, the Cossack is good enough for your jests. The Cossack is bloody—the Cossack is revengeful—and in your dreams you cling to the man who has slain multitudes for a whim—"

Springing to her feet, Nada faced him with blazing eyes.

"Stop! I have given my love to no man."

"Nay, only you can know if Otrèpiev be man or fiend."

"I—"

Nada caught her breath, and the sound of it was surely a sob. The next instant she had grasped the hilt of the *yataghan* and drawn the weapon with a thin slither of steel. With all the strength of shoulders and arm she struck at Kirdy, and the twisted blade stopped over her head as if bound by chains.

The Cossack, laughing wildly, had caught her wrist with one hand and when she sought to snatch the sword in her left hand he drew her forward and turned her about so that her head pressed back against his shoulder and his left hand grasped her girdle, holding her helpless. Her sheepskin hat fell off, and the loosened tangle of silk-like hair swept against his throat.

"Look!" he said between his teeth. And Nada ceased futile struggling to stare up at the heights.

In the maw of blackness between two of the peaks a red eye of light was visible.

"It is in the pass," Kirdy went on grimly, "far above the *tayga*, where no Tatars venture. That is the fire of Otrèpiev, and when you beheld it you said to me, 'Turn back!' You would have led me from the trail."

"As God lives, that is a lie. I did not see the light."

But Kirdy merely laughed between his teeth, and released the girl, turning his back upon her as if the *yataghan* and her anger, and his, did not exist.

"Hi, Arslan! Make ready the packs. We will go upon the road."

Nada stood utterly still, one arm pressed against her heart, and presently she sheathed the sword, and came to Kirdy but did not touch him.

"You are wild with the fever," she said quietly. "Pour water on your head, walk about, and then sleep. Then in the morning go whither you will. I—I have no place to go, except to the Tatars, and would you have me do that?"

"Nay, you shall not leave my side until the end of the road."

She waited while Kirdy and the Tatar made up the packs and saddled the ponies with experienced hands in the darkness. Arslan, after a glance into the Cossack's face and another at the gleam of light above them, made no objection to entering the forest on horses that had not slept.

The three mounted and moved off in silence, leaving the glen with its starlight at once. And when they entered the gloom of the forest, they were no longer three. Arslan turned aside and made off toward the valley.

"Eh," he said, a week later, at the *yurta* of his clan, "I saw the light. It was the eye of Shaitan, looking out from the gate in the rampart."

CHAPTER XVIII

> In elder days the wise men foregathered and said: Thus and so shall be the Law. And a woman, fair to see, came and spurned the Law, dancing upon it with light feet.
>
> And thereupon the youth of the land came and made an oath, saying: Thus and so shall be the Faith between us. When they had parted, a girl-child with flowers in her hair, laughed at the Faith.
>
> Yet when the old men and the youths girded on their armor and went with their chariots to a distant battle, the women kept the Law and abode by the Faith. And who shall say why this was done?

NADA could be surprizingly patient. Her father had taught her that there is an end to everything. She talked, low-voiced, to the big bay charger that pricked up his ears and surged forward gallantly when she noticed him; she crooned at the eagles that flickered past the forest mesh, and she hunted wild turkeys with a bow while she waited for the black rage to leave Kirdy and the ascent of the Earth Girdle to end.

At evening—for the Cossack pressed on, and cooked only one meal in the day—she plucked a turkey or roasted a deer's quarter and made barley and cheese cakes for them both, while Kirby attended to the horses. Only once did he speak.

"This companion of Otrèpiev—who is he?"

Nada, bending over the fire, made answer quietly.

"One of the Tsar's dogs."

Then Kirdy knew that the man with the false Tsar was an executioner—one of the torturers kept by the Muscovite lords. Otrèpiev had chosen a motley court to go upon his exile, and now, except for the interpreter of dreams, only this man garbed in black and armed with a two-handed sword —Kirdy had caught a glimpse of him during the fighting in the Turkoman camp—remained at the fugitive's side.

Nada's quick eyes missed nothing of the ascent. She knew when the birches and alders gave place to blue firs that they were near the end of the *tayga* and near the spot where the fire had been seen. Ahead of them the mountain slopes closed in, and down this gorge a bitter wind howled as if it were a watch-dog chained in the cut of the mountain.

She knew when Kirdy found the scattered ashes of the fire two days old. For an hour he examined the earth in a wide circle about the spot, and though Nada could see nothing at all in the ground, a sudden tensing of his dark brow and flicker of the thin lips told her that he had made certain that Otrèpiev had gone up the gorge. She had learned to read his face, if not his thoughts.

"Sleep, Nada," he ordered her. "We will rest and the horses will roll and graze."

By this she was aware that the fever had left him, and she did sleep, drawing her sheepskins about her against the chill breath of that wind—the sleep of the young and weary. But at times she heard the Cossack moving about, and the crackle of a growing fire, and the neighing of horses led to water. Near at hand a stream tore down the mountain side between black boulders—a stream that foamed, milky white. And Nada, who knew nothing of glacier-fed streams, was astonished because this one had roared past when she lay down in the late afternoon, and did no more than murmur when she roused at sunrise.

Kirdy, who never seemed to sleep—after that first night in the storm when she had held his head on her knee—led the way into the teeth of the wind.

That day they left the last, stunted trees behind, and the short grass changed to a mossy growth that clung to the rocks, and the sides of the gorge became sheer cliffs that rose higher until the face of the sun was hidden. They saw the bones of a horse, from which foul-smelling vultures flapped up lazily.

Once they circled the pool under a thousand-foot waterfall—the source of the stream that had given them water for the last day. The sun's rays reached the summit of the narrow fall, and tinted the spray in an arc of color that made the girl gasp.

Then, when the roar of the fall had dwindled to a distant reverberation, Kirdy heard her singing against the voice of the wind:

"Tell me, brother Eagle, is it far to my home—
  Far to blessed Mother Volga's shore?
I am hungry, brother Eagle, hungry and cold.
  I will ride no more—no more!"

And, though he pushed ahead without a word, he was troubled. This was the song of Cossack captives, who went in chains to distant lands. He wondered why Nada had chosen it, and whether sickness had touched her.

That night she slept like the dead, and Kirdy tended the fire at her feet—the glimmer of a fire, fed by the wood one pony had packed up from the forest. And while he watched, he listened to the twin voices of the Earth Girdle—the strident cry of the wind gusts and the moan of the waterfall.

In spite of the wind's breath, the fire burned badly, unaccountably so. And when he filled the pot with water and tried to boil the Tatar tea brick in it, he could not do so. Kirdy set this down to the working of the evil spirits that must frequent such a place.

Although he got up, to walk stiffly up and down between the boulders, drowsiness clutched at him and was not to be shaken off. So, when at last he seated himself by the unconscious girl, his head slipped forward on his chest. He had to struggle for breath. Almost at once the two voices of the pass swelled in volume, and strange words came to the Cossack's ears:

"Ai-a—come and see! The night birds await thee! Many have come! Come thou!"

That was the cry of the night wind.

"Oho-ho-o! What lies beyond the Gate? A grave. She will ride to the end of the road, but if ill befalls thee, what of her?"

Such was the warning roar that came up from the fall.

"She will lead thee astray—wait and see. We have seen her before and we know—"

"Fool—she trusts thee. Turn back! What hope is there for the blind?"

Then the wind's note changed swiftly to the clang of war cymbals and the monotone of the fall to the mutter of drums. The Cossack heard the clashing of shod hoofs on stones, the snapping of standards, the creaking of great wagons drawn by yoked oxen, and the roaring battle shout of riders.

The pass was filled with moving shadows and sound. Under the space of starlight above him gleamed the weapons of a host. He heard the snarling of laden camels, the snorting of horses, and the clang and clash of shields.

This, he thought, must be the Golden Horde coming up from its city. And surely he heard a deafening shout:

"Make way—make way! He comes, the Khan of all the Hordes!"

KIRDY sprang up, his limbs chilled and stiff. He peered around him and saw that the line of sky between the rock walls was gray. The roar of the fall had dwindled to a whisper and the fitful wind was no more than a mocking whimper. At his side the horses were stamping and snorting, and Nada, roused by his sudden movement, lifted her head and smiled at the dawn drowsily.

"If such be the watchers," the Cossack thought, "at the gate, what will be the folk of the city?"

Before now he had slept on the upper slopes of a mountain range, and at such times dreams had troubled him; breathing had been difficult, and the fire had acted strangely. Whether all this were caused by evil spirits—dreaded by the Tatars—or by the wind and the cold of the heights, he neither knew nor cared. The night was past, the day at hand.

"Did you hear the cymbals and the drums, White Falcon?" the girl asked.

"Aye."

"The Tatars say that is the Horde, marching through the gate. When they hear it, down below, they are afraid."

"Nay, little Nada—it was the wind, and the thunder of the fall."

"Listen!" She smiled at him in the gloom of the gorge. "Now the voice of the fall is only a little voice, and the wind barely stirs."

"Then it may be that the city is near, and the guards upon the wall sound cymbal and drum at the dawn hour."

"Do they drive camels through the pass at that hour? Nay, this is the gate!"

She pointed at the sheer rock walls, now growing gray, and Kirdy saw that the pass fell away, to the east. They had camped almost at its highest point. The thought struck him that Otrèpiev and the Muscovite might have turned back and passed them during the night and the two horses, clattering among the stones, might have made the uproar.

But this he did not believe. A man like Otrèpiev would not have passed a fire without investigating, or a half dozen ponies without trying to seize them. Also, the Cossack was certain that a horse coming up the pass—a living horse with a rider would have roused him from his stupor.

If it had been a dream, Nada would not have heard the same sounds, and his ponies would not have been aroused and restless before the first light.

No, he had listened to the passage of an armed host, an array not of mortal men but of ghosts. And it was this Horde of the dead that the Tatars feared. Whence came it, and whither did it ride? What matter? The dead were the dead.

"They paid us no heed!" Nada mused. "*Ai*, Kirdy, it was surely a warning."

By now the light was strong enough for him to look closely into her eyes, shadowed by weariness and yet bright with a kind of fever. And he groaned, clutching both hands upon his belt. They were at the gate of the Earth Girdle; beyond might be a barren land where food could not be hunted down.

In his anger, a few nights ago, he had ordered Nada to ride on, with him. Better for her, if she had struck him down with the *yataghan!* Better, perhaps, if she had kept at Otrèpiev's side.

"Go back, then, little Nada," he said

gruffly. "Aye, the Cossack is mad—he has hurt you. How can you go on, in such a land as this where the spirits ride as a regiment? Take the horses, and—God keep you!"

He took her head in his powerful hands, pressing against the tangle of soft tresses; but his head hung upon his chest, and he did not see her eyes open very wide, or the sudden flush that darkened her skin.

"Whither?" she asked quietly. "Could I, a woman, ride alone with horses through the tribes?"

Again he groaned, thinking that Arslan, the ax-man, who might be relied upon to protect Nada, had run from them.

"Aye," he said, touching the ikon at her bare throat. "The good Saint Ulass will guard you, as among wolves."

"Foolish Cossack!" she smiled. "Now we are past the gate, and is there less of peril before than behind? Fool, to have crossed the Earth Girdle! Nay, I think we are near the end of the road. Come, and see."

As Nada had prophesied, the sides of the gorge fell away, and the trail dipped sharply. Rounding a turn a little after sunrise they came out on a point of rocks and reined in, Kirdy silently, the girl with a quick cry of wonder.

Over the rim of distant mountain ranges the sun glared at them, and all the way to this far-off horizon were ridges and the purple shadows of ranges. Here and there in the nearer valleys the golden beds of lakes flared.

So great was the elevation of the point on which they stood, they could discern no trees or animal life below them. Instead of the gray-green steppes, they stared down at red cliffs and gorges still mist-shrouded. Red and gray, and barren, this land beyond the Earth Girdle might have been shaped by blind and tortured giants.

Nada shaded her eyes and looked down.

"See, my White Falcon, here is the city."

Kirdy nodded; he had seen it at once and now he leaned on his saddle horn, studying it.

For more than a thousand yards the mountain fell away steeply beneath him—sheer cliffs, at places. At the foot of this descent a plateau extended out. The top of the plateau, or table formation, was fairly level, and he thought that it towered far above the lower valley.

At the plateau's level, the mountain was limestone. And the city of the Golden Horde was the same red and white stone, with bits of gray granite and other rock that glittered—quartz or porphyry.

It was a ruin.

From where the Cossack stood, the twisted streets looked like gullies—the dwellings, piles of crumbled stone. He traced out terraces and bastions, without being able to decide whether they had been wrought by men's hands or by nature. There were patches of green growth and glints of water.

But, running down in long zigzags from the point of rock, was a road, or rather the remnant of a road, covered at spots with rubble and fallen away completely at places. This road was the only way down from the pass.

Tevakel Khan's nomads would no more have built that ramp down the mountainside than nature itself could have done so. At one time men had hewn it out and built it up.

And so, at one time, men must have lived on the plateau. By now he could see the lower valley through the mist—the dense mesh of forest growth that seemed no greater than moss—the lighter green of the valley bed where the mist was clearing, and the brilliance of a lake that looked like a jewel.

The men who had lived upon the rock plateau could have grazed their herds thousands of feet below—or perhaps the plateau was a citadel, a refuge in time of war. Beyond doubt, there was water, wood and game in the valley.

But he could see no solitary sign of man.

CHAPTER XIX

THE END OF THE ROAD

"GREGORY OTRÈPIEV," Nada mused, "would have gone down to that city. He would like to see what the ruins are, and what people live there."

"Eagles live there," Kirdy made answer, "and vipers—not men."

"We will soon know. At least some one has gone down the trail."

That much the Cossack had already ascertained. He had seen tracks in a cascade of soft earth, where one horse had rubbed against the slope, and another had trampled the fresh dirt. They were half-way down the traverse road, and the worst of it was before them. That slide of earth told a story of frightened horses rearing back, and riders hovering over eternity.

But Otrèpiev had gone on, and Kirdy meant to follow. He bade Nada dismount, and took the rein of the bay stallion. The hardy Tatar ponies kept their footing wisely but the charger was all nerves. The Cossack talked to him and Nada coaxed, and it was one of the ponies that missed a short jump, and hurtled screaming down the face of the cliff, with a thunder of rock and loosened dirt.

The charger took the jump with a yard to spare, and it needed all Nada's weight on the rein to keep him from plunging ahead with the sudden spurt of a high-strung horse that thinks danger lurks under his rear.

"Well done!" Kirdy cried, as the girl quieted the bay stallion. "Here Otrèpiev lost one of his mounts."

A speck on the valley bed had caught his eye—a cluster of vultures that had dined on something. Obviously something a day or more old, because a score of the flapping creatures rose into the air to investigate the Tatar pony that had finally stopped, an inert huddle, not so far away. The distance was too great to make out whether they had been feeding on a horse or a man, but Kirdy prayed that it was a horse and that Otrèpiev who had led him across the Earth Girdle, still lived on the plateau, now near at hand.

And Nada read his mind with a single glance.

"What will you do, White Falcon, when you meet with Otrèpiev?"

"Bid him to sabers."

Both had jumped to the same conclusion at once. If Otrèpiev and his companion were living and on the plateau, they might well have noticed the fall of the pony and the miniature avalanche that set a hundred echoes flying. If they happened go be on the cliff side of the city, they might have seen the two pursuers.

"*Ech boula, ni boula,*" Nada tossed her head. "Maybe death to me, maybe not—what matter! So the Cossack says. And what, O my hero, if both fools die—and I am left alive with the Tsar's dog, who has been trained since birth to torture and who carries a sword as long as himself? Take heed! If you must fight Otrèpiev, agree with him as to that. But first do you and he and the other band together to journey safely back across the Earth Girdle."

Kirdy frowned and shook his head. The sun was well up by now and the glare of it against the white limestone had made him throw off the tattered sable coat, so that he walked in a worn red shirt, slashed and stained where he had been wounded. His lean head was dark as the long hair that fell over one shoulder—Nada, considering him, thought that he did look like a falcon, swift and merciless.

"If Otrèpiev were a true Cossack, or even a *boyarin* of honor, I would do that," he made response curtly. "But he has betrayed men too often."

"And if he comes to you sick, asking aid?"

Kirdy laughed grimly.

"Let him first do it."

"He has another with him, and he himself is a match for you. What if the other draws and strikes when your blade is turned against Otrèpiev?"

Again the Cossack laughed shortly, touching the splendid hilt of his curved sword.

"God gives. I desire only that."

Under veiling lashes, the girl looked at him steadily, and a sudden purpose made her tingle.

"Nada," Kirdy said gravely, "whatever happens, you must not draw that plaything, the *yataghan*."

"Could I draw against the man in black with the sword that is longer than I?" she demanded reasonably. "And would you suffer me to stand against Otrèpiev?"

She sighed, and fell silent—unwontedly silent. Kirdy became grimly intent on their surroundings. They had reached the foot of the ramp and here a shelving ledge allowed them to walk oposite the plateau.

They discovered what had been concealed from sight until now. Somewhere in the mountains a river had its source, a river that foamed down in flood when winter loosened its hold on the heights, but that now was no more than a bed of round stones, far below them.

This river ran, in season, between the mountainside and the mass of the plateau where the city stood. During countless ages it had eaten through the soft stone and clay until it formed a chasm. The chasm was thirty yards or so across—its depth unguessable.

And now there was no doubt at all that the city on the plateau had been built by men. The ruin of a wall ran along the rim across the defile. The wall had been built of hewn stone blocks and the Cossack knew that this city of the Golden Horde had been invulnerable to attack. No enemy, advancing down the ramp and forming, shelterless, along the ledge, could have stormed the city wall.

The other three sides of the plateau looked unclimbable. Probably there was—or had been—a way down from the city to the lower valley. But this other road, being hung on the face of a cliff, could not be stormed. The city, then, could not have been taken by an enemy from without. Why had it been abandoned? Kirdy was too busy finding a way across the chasm to wonder.

His search for a while was fruitless. The river that had cut the plateau from the mountain a thousand centuries ago, had done its work well—except at one spot. Here he had noticed twin gate towers rising on the other side. Since these towers must have defended the entrance, he led the way along the ledge toward them, praying that the bridge or whatever it might be, was still standing.

So at midday they reached the gate and found not a bridge man-made, but an arch of limestone that spanned the chasm.

Once the river must have plunged underground here—or dipped below a broad shelf of rock to thunder over a fall. The rock bridge had been worn by the elements until at the middle a tall man's arms might have spanned it. Also, it had been eaten down to the center.

In the white dust atop the limestone were the tracks of a horse and two men, leading fairly through the opening between the towers—where a barrier of wood and iron must have stood in other years.

"Go last, Nada!" Kirdy swept the ruined wall, the expanse between the towers, with a swift glance and started down the natural bridge, leading the charger. If his enemies were hidden in the ruins with so much as a pistol or a bow between them, he was doomed; but he felt no fear and the proof of it was that the charger followed him willingly, with only a pricking of ears and shortening of strides. The ponies ambled across indifferently, and Nada brought up the rear, laughing.

A BLAZING sun, beating on the white dust of streets and the gray and red ruins, half blinded them, and a vagrant wind clutched at them. They stood within sight of what had been the *registan,* the open square of the city.

Here a gray scum of tamarisk impeded progress, and the crumbling stone was covered with thorn and creepers. A sluggish gray snake with mottled red back crept past their feet. Remembering that little water remained in the goatskins, Kirdy investigated a pool of water that lay between two houses. It was bordered with sparkling salt incrustations, and small plants covered with brilliant orange and red berries. A glance convinced the Cossack that the water was undrinkable, the berries inedible.

Then his head jerked up, and the horses moved restlessly.

"O-ho-o! O-HO-O! O-ho!"

Some one had laughed and started up the echoes again. It was a mad, exulting laugh that seemed anything but human. It might mean that they were both watched and mocked, or their presence entirely unsuspected. Nada shivered and drew closer to Kirdy.

"Let us go to the palace. I think it is yonder on the height. From there we can see—"

Taking the horses, which were as precious as life itself, the Cossack wound through vine-cumbered alleys and over fallen walls to an edifice that was marked by several stone columns, still standing. He avoided the *registan* and the wider streets, and only paused when in a bed of clay or sand he saw scattered bones that had fallen away from the skeleton of a man.

Not long before, he had come upon rows of tombs—square chambers of granite sunk into the earth and surmounted by stone pyramids. Several of these tombs stood open, and he had gone into one.

"An evil fate came upon this place," he muttered to Nada. "Here be many bodies lying in the houses, and few in the tombs. How did it happen that the men of the Horde died in dwellings and were not buried?"

Nada only shook her head. But when they had climbed out of the alleys to a brick roadway that led up to a granite-flagged courtyard, she gasped. The place was large enough for the tents of a whole tribe.

Slender aspens and twisted oaks, thrusting through the stones, had grown to full stature in the years since the city had been deserted. And from the courtyard a stairway of veined marble ascended to the pillars.

At the summit of the stair Kirdy pushed aside a mesh of undergrowth and stepped through to what had been an anteroom of the palace. From here other stairs led up to the central hall, marked by the columns still standing and by others like prone giants, fallen across the ruins.

He was hidden from the sight of any one in the city below by the fringe of tamarisks and trees around the knoll. But by climbing to the dais at the far end he had a view of the more distant portion of the city, and the first thing he saw was a line of smoke rising from an open spot. A horse was picketed near the smoke, and the horse was not saddled.

"*Hai*," he cried, "there is the camp of Otrèpiev."

Although he watched attentively for some moments, he could see no men moving among the ruins. Nada sat down, chin on hand, to gaze up at the Earth Girdle they had left that morning—the bulwarks of mighty mountains, rising into wisps of clouds, through which appeared at times the snow of the summits. The sun shone out of a blazing sky and eagles, floating against the gray veil of mist, were sharply etched as black jewels sewn upon silk.

So Nada mused. But Kirdy, striding up and down the dais, was burning with impatience.

"It is the end of the road," he laughed. "I seek the false Dmitri, and you—"

"I shall stay here with the horses."

He turned in his stride, to frown and think. He did not want to part from the girl, but to take her, and the horses—no, the danger was below.

"Abide here then," he advised her, "and if God sends death to me and I come not by the next dawn, take the stallion and go up the pass without halting."

"God and His holy angels keep you, White Falcon."

So she responded, without looking at him, her lips close pressed and her eyes shut. She heard the grating of steel as he tried his sword in its scabbard, and his steps moving away, down the hall of the columns.

He left the palace at a spot where he could not be seen, and struck through the hollows until he reached the edge of the *registan* again. Here he sighted the thin line of smoke, and ran, crouching, from ruin to ruin, stopping at times to listen with his head close to the ground.

But Nada remained without moving, chin on hand, gazing up at the Earth Girdle, listening to the horses that were grazing upon the bushes and scattered grass. So she sat, wondering why she had determined to stay where she was, in spite of the grief that chilled her veins and heart, until a voice near at hand aroused her.

"So, little Nada, you have kept your promise. Behold, I have kept mine!"

Blinking—for the sun was full in her eyes—she turned and saw Gregory Otrèpiev sitting on a block of marble upon the dais and smiling at her.

HIS powerful arms rested on his knees, and the woman in her took note of the rents and tears in the long coat that covered his rusted armor. A scruff of beard had grown over his chin, and his long blue eyes gleamed from his dark skin.

"My court," he said, "is small, yet when you sit at my feet I am more honored than any emperor."

Her lips parted to cry out, when she remembered that the Cossack was far beyond hearing. Then, too, she saw Otrèpiev's courtier. A man taller than Kirdy leaned on a five-foot sword, holding in the crook of his arm the silvered casque with the eagle crest of the false Dmitri. His black satin garments were gray with dust, and his drawn, sun-blackened face was expressionless as a mask. His lips smiled.

"My armorer, my counselor, my equerry and executioner!" Otrèpiev waved a scarred hand at the *oprichniky*, the torturer. "Faith, lass, he stands upon the edge of madness. 'Twas his laugh enriched this silence a while ago, and spurred your Cossack on to stalk my camp. I love him like a brother—" his restless eyes roamed the ruins— "By the Horned One, here are five good horses!"

"Have you ever kept a promise, False Dmitri?"

"Rarely—only when it suited me. The weak promise when they have no other surety. Nay, I said to you—'I will make myself master of that city beyond the Earth

Girdle.' Have you forgotten? I think not. So, I sit on what is left of the throne."

"Yet you are not master here."

Otrèpiev considered her.

"I could find fault in you for telling me of this place—Satan's playground! What a city! Majestic it may be, but empty—too empty."

"Have you not seen, or heard, its people?"

"If you mean the wild Cossack—I saw him climbing up the pass with you. It was a goodly sight, but it puzzled me. In the Turco-Tatar slaughter I saw him riding at me, and how was I to know whether the pair of you came to render allegiance or put me in my grave? Which was it?"

Nada's dark eyes surveyed him steadily and she did not speak.

"Well," Otrèpiev mused aloud, "if the fellow is your lover, you must have lost your wit. When I found your city to be an empty shell, I occupied myself with preparing a reception for my pursuers, watching you descend that accursed path. I sent my faithful servitor to set up a camp within plain sight—a smoking fire and a foundered horse. By now your Cossack is squatting on his haunches near it—we saw him circle it. But I was here, behind this dais, before you came. When he returns to you we will be waiting, and Feodor will slice off another head."

"The people of this city are the dead. We heard them ride upon the Earth Girdle."

"Doubtless. They did not trouble my dreams. But we shall strike east from here. The valley below has a pleasant look."

"You are not master of this place, Otrèpiev, because it is peopled with the dead!"

The man on the marble throne slab smiled.

"I remember now, little Nada, you said that peace was to be found here. A beautiful girl may be pardoned a bad jest—"

"But you are not dead, Otrèpiev—how can you be lord of this Horde?"

"Ah, you are grinding wheat to look for chaff. What matter, if you have come to sit at my feet?"

The close-set blue eyes blazed upon her restlessly. Whenever Otrèpiev spoke, neither eyes nor hands were still, and yet his voice was full and deep. A man of great physical strength, acting impulsively, he made no secret of his delight in Nada's beauty and youth. He addressed her as a child, to be humored—a woman to be desired.

He glanced down at the ruined hall of columns.

"Eh, little Nada, the weeds and lizards keep the court of ancient kings. Was this place built by an emperor of Cathay, or by the Macedonian, Alexander, who made himself master of the world? I might have aroused the Muscovites as he did the Macedonians, except for one thing—superstition. The beast would not come out of its stall! I showed them the path of glory, and they harkened to the chants of bald priests. I brought to Moscow a Polish bride, and they cringed. Fools!"

He shrugged and smiled wryly.

"How fared the lady of Sandomir? She was a painted stick beside you, Nada, lass. Eh—eh!"

The girl stood up, tossing back the mass of gleaming hair from her shoulders. The heat of the day had been so great she had thrown off her *svitka* and was clad only in white linen shirt and slender embroidered vest, over the loose Turkish trousers.

"A handsome Cossack—hi, Feodor!" Otrèpiev looked up at the silent headsman.

"I am here," Nada said, "at your feet. But if you would so much as touch me with your hand, you must first overpower me with the sword."

Otrèpiev frowned, and then his brow cleared.

"Why, so you said in the steppes. I will do it at once, my lass."

"And will you wear mail, my lord, in facing a woman's sword?"

For an instant Otrèpiev hesitated, and Nada laughed at him.

"Do you fear the Cossack, then, O my emperor?"

"Not I—nor shall you mock me."

Otrèpiev cast loose his cloak and the tall Feodor assisted him out of the rusty mail shirt.

OTRÊPIEV turned to the brief bit of weapon-play with the relish that he felt in anything that diverted his thoughts. His restlessness covered black brooding, and he dreaded to be left to himself; when another was with him he talked constantly, and until his flight from the Tatars he drank heavily of the spirits among his stores. He had been morose since the defeat of the Turkomans whom he had expected to sweep over Tevakel Khan, but Nada's coming had restored his good humor. It was a good omen—the girl and fresh horses.

"To one death," Nada breathed, "to the other life!"

Otrèpiev lowered his blade and glanced at her keenly. Her face was ashen and her lips trembled, as she spoke the Cossack salutation before a duel.

"Answer me one question!" he demanded. "Do you love this Cossack?"

Nada flushed and met his eyes fairly.

"Aye—the White Falcon has my love. When we met in Moscow he was master of my heart, and it was to follow him that I joined you in the steppe. You—the traitor that played at kingship. In the steppes he took leadership among the Tatars and it was he who overthrew you and the Turkomans. But he has thought that I serve you, and he has no faith in me."

"The ——!" said Otrèpiev, thoughtfully.

The next instant with eye and foot and hand, he was fighting for his life.

Nada had sprung at him as a Cossack rushes, recklessly, raining cut upon cut. Surprized, Otrèpiev gave ground a little, and settled himself to parry the flashing blade that darted at his throat and slashed at his side.

Again he stepped back, and Nada pressed in, her eyes narrowed, her lip gripped between her teeth. Once he parried and tried a quick twist of the saber that should have disarmed her, but the *yataghan* slid clear.

The brain of Otrèpiev fought coolly, telling him that his saber was heavier than the girl's weapon, his strength greater. He only needed to ward off her first rush, and then—

Again Nada pressed him back, making no effort to parry, but striving to thrust inside his close-drawn guard.

"The girl is mad!" he thought, and then the evil impulse of desire that always lurked behind his brain seized upon him. The struggle had stirred him—he wanted to drive his blade past Nada's weapon, to strike it deep into her breast. To slay always delighted him, and, after all, if this wild Cossack lass loved the warrior, she might work him harm. Aye, better deal with her as he desired!

A moment later Otrèpiev stepped back, smiling, and lowered his saber, glancing at the darkened tip.

Nada's *yataghan* clattered on the stones, and she bent her head, fumbling with a long lock of hair that had fallen over her shoulder. Gathering the golden tresses in her hand, she pressed against her side, where Otrèpiev's saber had pierced under the heart.

Then she sank to her knees and lay down, as if utterly weary, on the stones. Tall Feodor came and bent over her with professional interest.

"*Kniaz veliky*," he spoke for the first time, "my prince, your blade did not go deep. To make sure, another thrust is best."

Otrèpiev stared eagerly at the girl's drawn face, the pallid lips and the circles under her eyes.

"Keep back, you dog," he muttered at his follower.

And after a moment Feodor touched his shoulder.

"Great Prince, guard yourself!"

Startled, Otrèpiev heard the impact of boots on the stones, and looked up as Kirdy leaped a fallen column.

The Cossack must have seen Nada as he leaped, because he came at them without pause or spoken word. He was panting from the long run, and his sword arm quivered. In his eyes, under tortured brows, was the glare of death itself.

He swerved toward Otrèpiev and his heavy blade rang on the Muscovite's saber as the other stepped back to put space between them and Feodor.

"Slash him down, dog!" he panted at the headsman who was swinging up his broadsword silently.

Kirdy heard and swerved away as Feodor struck, the long blade hissing through the air.

"From two sides!" snarled Otrèpiev. "Come at him from the other side!"

As he cried out, he parried swiftly, because Kirdy had put him between himself and the headsman. For an instant Otrèpiev could do no more than ward the whirling blade that sought head and throat as a wolf strikes. Meanwhile Feodor circled warily, swinging up his broadsword. Kirdy did not seem to notice him—certainly did not glide away as before.

Feodor tensed his arms and the Cossack leaped high in the air, turning as he did so. His saber hissed down and in, and for an instant Feodor stood poised on massive limbs.

The man's head fell down on his chest, held only by one of the throat muscles—and the throat had been all but cut through.

"Ha!" Otrèpiev gasped.

He heard Feodor's sword and then the giant body fall to the stone flags; but his saber was locked fast by the Cossack's blade. For a moment the eyes of the two, beaded with sweat and blood-shot, glared, and then Kirdy wrenched free.

A wave of hot anger swept over Otrèpiev, and fear beat at his heart, like a hammering pulse. With a cry he sprang forward, and his right hand, grasping the saber, flew off and slid along the stone slabs. Kirdy struck twice at the bent head of his foe, and, cut through the temples on either side, the body of Otrèpiev stumbled and dropped beside his henchman.

Kirdy wasted no second's thought upon him. Running to Nada, he cut the fastenings of her vest and drew it off, then gently pulled away the hand and the clotted tresses. With quivering fingers he felt the narrow wound.

Then he turned her on her left side, to check the inward bleeding, and as he did so, her hand touched his arm and felt up it, until she could stroke his head.

"The end—" her lips moved—"of the road."

The Cossack glanced around wildly. To heal such a wound in a comrade he would have given a draft of powder mixed in vodka. But he had neither powder nor vodka, and he did not know what more to do, except to bring water.

"O Father and Son, hear me," he cried. "The spirit of little Nada flutters like a pigeon in the storm wind. It goes, her spirit, from my hands. Harken, O White Christ, and thou, souls of the Cossack heroes who dwell in the regions above—there is faith in this maiden, and knightly honor. Did she not draw her sword bravely? Is it fitting she should die by the sword of a traitor and a dog?"

When he returned with water, Nada drank a little, and signed for him to bend closer.

"I love you, White Falcon—even your shadow and the horse you ride. I stayed behind because I feared *he* was hiding near by. Truly, then, I thought I might slay *him*, so they could not fall upon you. But—promise me you will not leave me, White Falcon. Hold me in your arms and take me from this place, down to the valley, my Falcon."

The rush of words ceased and her lips quivered.

Kirdy looked up. Already vultures were dropping down on the columns and the throne slab. The wind threshed through the dry growth, and up the Earth Girdle clouds of driven dust hid the pass and the heights.

"Aye, little Nada," he said, gently, "I promise."

Here was something he could do. Yet no living man could carry the suffering girl up that wind-whipped ramp to the desolate pass—or make the horses follow. When he had circled Otrèpiev's bait of a camp—and had noticed that the fire was left to die and the horse likewise—he had suspected the trap set for him and had gone back instantly, until he heard the clash of weapons and had run like one possessed. But before then he had seen what Otrèpiev had discovered, a road winding down the east face of the plateau.

So, only stopping to bind Feodor's great sword and Otrèpiev's helmet on the charger's saddle, he tied up Nada's wound with strips of his shirt and lifted her in his arms, keeping the stallion's rein in his fingers. The ponies trailed after, and no sooner had they moved away than the vultures closed in upon the bodies of the false Dmitri and his solitary companion, the torturer.

"IT WAS a dog's burial," Kirdy thought, "but it is well suited to Gregory Otrèpiev, because he has left his bones in the hall of a king. Bold he was, but not a good Cossack. He kept faith with no one, and he handled a sword badly."

Weary beyond knowing, Kirdy strode on into darkness and wind. The night had brought the first of the autumn's storms, and gusts of rain whipped the mesh of the *tayga* over his head. The burden of the unconscious girl had numbed his arms long since, but as long as he could feel Nada's heart pulsing slowly under his fingers he kept on.

When neither wind, nor the bitter air of the heights that hinted at snow penetrated to him, he halted and laid Nada down in the darkness, upon ferns and pine needles. When he was able to raise his arms again, he took down the broadsword from the stallion's saddle, and groped for branches and fallen wood.

A fire kindled and fed to roaring flames, he shook the stupor of sleep from his brain and hacked down young firs, working incessantly until he put together the framework of a low hut, and covered three sides with branches. Then he took the saddle from the stallion and the packs from the two ponies that had followed patiently, to be unloaded. He watched them go down at once toward the muttering rush of a stream.

Then he hurried back to listen to the girl's even breathing. And the glare of exhaustion and anger left his dark eyes.

"She sleeps, the little Nada," he smiled. "Eh, there is faith in her, in all things. When the Muscovites would have taken her captive, she met them with the sword. With the dawn she will open her eyes."

He glanced up, at the whirling sparks. The hut was in a grove of gigantic deodars, whose branches rose beyond the firelight, whose tips threshed under the wind gusts that could not move the massive trunks.

A light flurry of snow came down on the Cossack—snow that powdered the hut without melting. He looked out at it thoughtfully.

"Aye, the pass through the Earth Girdle is closed. And here there is no road of any kind."

He was in a new world, where the sun rises. And Nada had given him her love. What matter the way, if they could ride forth together with no shadow of doubt between them and all the unknown ahead?

And yet, if Nada's eyes were closed, never to look up at him again, he would have no heart to fare forth or to live longer.

IT WAS the next summer that Arslan, the ax-man, came to the *yurta* of old Tevakel Khan, and squatted down at the edge of the white horseskin, announcing that he came as a bearer of tidings.

"Upon thee, O Khan of the *Altyn Juz*, Lord of the Lesser Horde, master of the plain, mirror of the faith, tree of the fruit of understanding—the salute!

"The words of caravan men from Cathay have reached my ears, and this is the tale:

"Where the forest meets the desert, far—far—these men beheld a pair of the *tengri* that come down at seasons from the heights and are visible to mortal eyes, as is well known. The tale was that one of these spirits was a man, wearing a silver helmet and bearing a sword as long as a spear. The other was a woman with hair like gold, glittering in the sun. Their faces were dark, yet in their voices was no sorrow. They asked, 'What land is this?' And the men of the caravan, being fearful, kneeled at a distance.

"Because, O Khan this twain spoke in pride and had the bearing of kings. So the caravan men went away swiftly, leaving gifts, thinking that they had seen the *tengri* that come down from the high places.

"And my thought is this—that the two are they I led up to the Earth Girdle in the month of the Ox. They followed thine enemy the *Fanga nialma* and surely they have overcome him, since they carry his sword and helmet. They have set at naught his magic. And now, being spirits, they wander without fear. That is my word, O Khan, my master."

With the tranquillity of the very old Tevakel Khan considered this, looking into the fire.

"It is evident," he said at length, "that this youth and maiden have crossed the Earth Girdle and passed through the city of the dead. It is known to me that in former days this city was built by our ancestors. And treachery arose in it as a viper lifts its head. The Khan of all the Hordes was slain, and his warriors, and brother fought with brother, until no more than a few families lived to flee. So, it is accursed and the unburied dead ride about it at night."

"And the youth and the maiden?" Arslan demanded, for his curiosity was very great.

Tevakel Khan smiled.

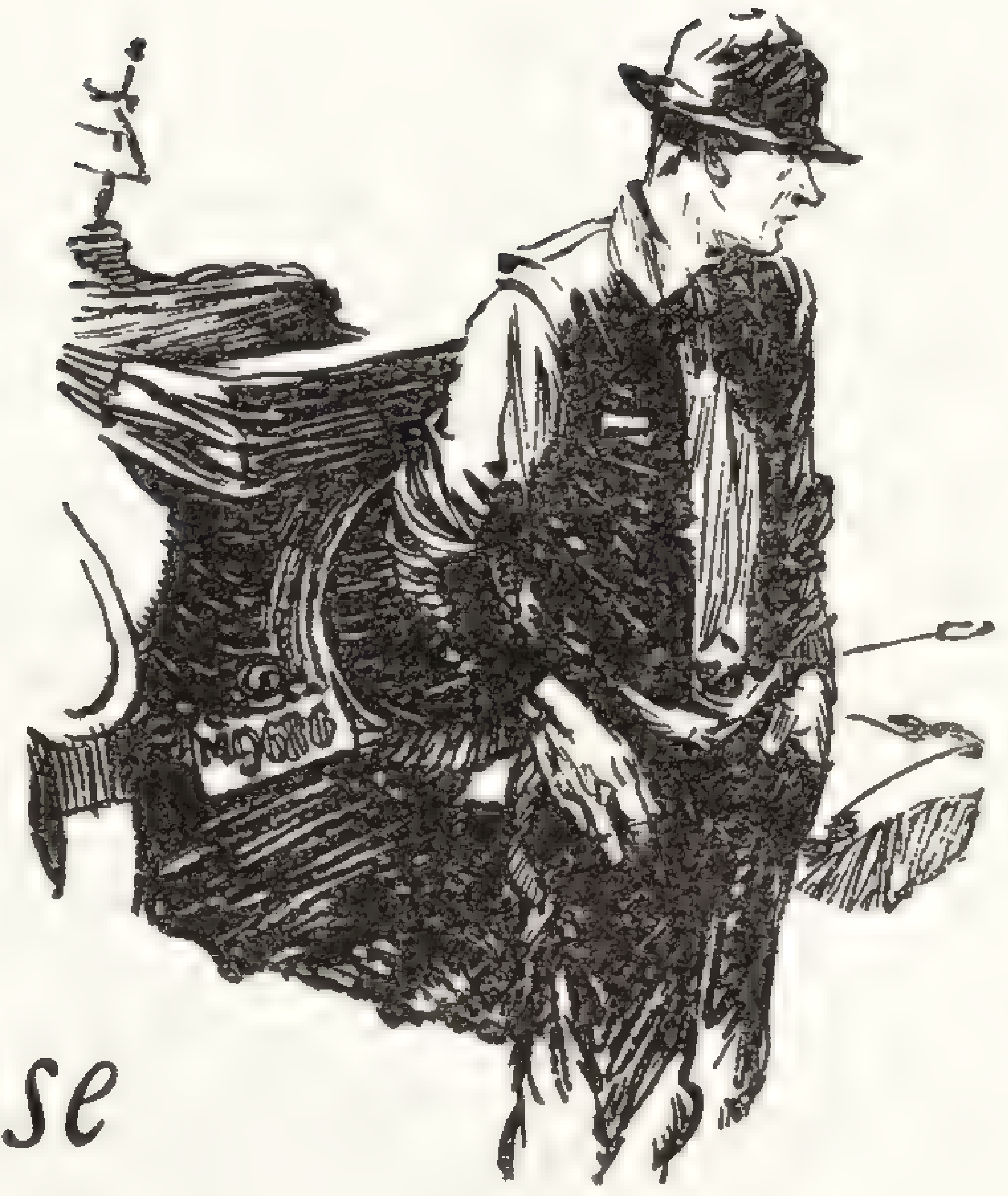
"Surely they are living mortals, or the caravan men would have seen them at night, not during the hours of the day."

He meditated upon this for a moment and came to a conclusion.

"In this twain there was great faith and little fear. *Kai*, the wolves harmed them not and the dead passed them by. To such as they, God hath given the keys of the unseen!"

DEAD MAN'S LUCK

By Harry G. Huse



A DOZEN men had seen the pliers, half-buried in the dust among the ruddy splinters, before James Farney came along and picked them up.

He was late on the scene, and had missed the first stark details. Doc Edwards had come and gone. Lawton was closing the doors of his car on the long wicker basket. There was nothing to see now but a jagged hole in the "safety" fence, one post teetering drunkenly over the slope, the wrecked car in the coulee-bottom—and the pliers.

They lay in the gray dust where the road-edge fell away to a hillside all leprous with sagebrush—hurled there from the shattered tool-box, or fallen from the driver's pocket. Farney turned them over curiously with his toe. They were bright and new, with unusually strong jaws. Pliers not nearly so good sold for fifty cents at the general store in town.

He turned them over again, and stood for a moment appraising them. A good strong pair of pliers, almost new! He stooped and picked them out of the dust, weighing them thriftily in his hand. The motion drew a sudden, startled attention from the little group still gaping at the scene of casualty. Under this sharp regard Farney went faintly sheepish.

"Here's a right good pair of pliers." He tried to say it in a disinterested manner.

"Yeh, I see 'em when I first come." This was Painter, the town pool-hall keeper. He had discovered the accident, and was still making the most of his distinction. "I see 'em right off, when I first got here, 'fore anybody else'd come. Poor Buck was still a-hangin' there on that post. He wasn't even cold yit! I let 'em lay!"

Farney missed the nod of approval which flickered through the group.

"A right good pair of pliers," he repeated, in his slow, frugal way, "a-goin' to waste there in the dirt. I gotta notion to chuck 'em in my car."

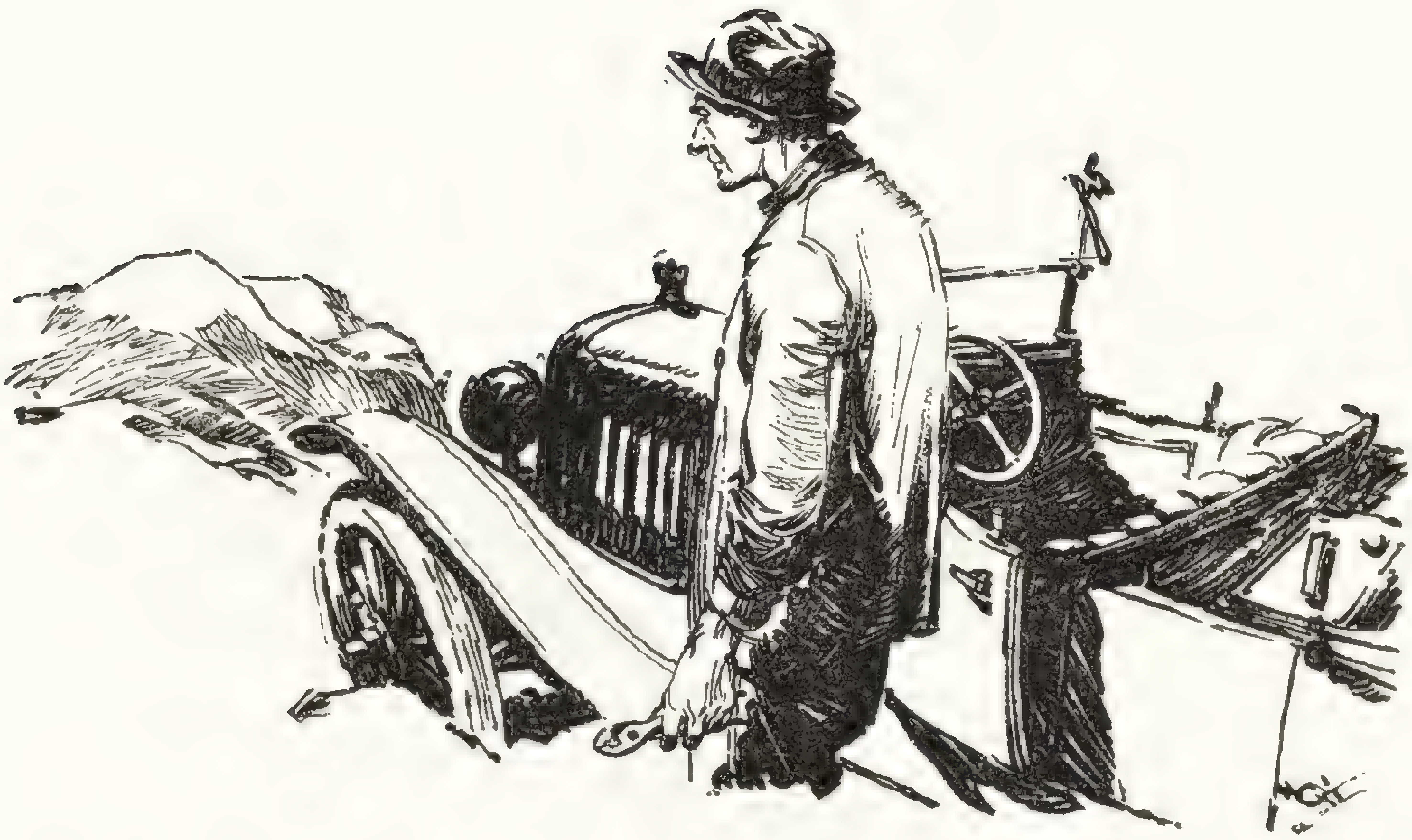
Painter's eyebrows came up sharply. The men around him, already huddled in the face of tragedy, edged closer together.

"They're better layin' there in the dirt! I'd let 'em lay!" Again Painter was encouraged by sagacious nods. "Dead man's pliers," he pronounced ominously, " 'll bring you dead man's luck."

James Farney laughed quietly.

"I ain't skeery 'bout sech things. I'm needin' a pair of pliers. These won't do nobody any good, a-layin' out here on the ground."

"They won't do nobody no good nowheres," scolded the pool-hall keeper. "That car down there turned over once before, 'nd killed a man. It ain't more'n two weeks sence Buck bought it in 'nd said *he* wasn't skeered to drive it. If you'd see what I see when I first come 'nd poor Buck was still a-hangin' there on that post—"



"All that was wrong with the car," interrupted Farney dryly, "was it hadn't any brakes to speak of. Buck was takin' chances he hadn't ought to with poor brakes."

Painter shrugged his shoulders, and made as if to turn away.

"All right," he said, in a voice gone surprizingly shrill and unpleasant, "all right. 'Tain't none of my put-in. If you're so hard up you'll take chances fer a four-bit pair of pliers picked up outa the dirt, *all right!*"

James Farney, in patched overalls and a faded denim jumper, reddened under the slur in the remark. Hard up? Well, what dry-lander wasn't, after two straight years of drouth? When wheat wouldn't grow you had to scrimp and save and watch the pennies—and the half-dollars—or lose your homestead! Hard up? Of course he was! But he didn't need any sympathy from soft-living town people. Or gossip about his actions either!

He checked himself midway of his slowly forming decision to pocket his find and laugh in Painter's face. The slack-mouthed fellow would be talking about the thing for months!

Farney turned reluctantly, and tossed the pliers back where he had found them. They landed with a smothered plop, and sank almost out of sight in the heavy dust. He scuffed them over to bury the temptation of their glitter.

There was nothing to see now, and it was hot and close in the narrow coulee. The group broke up, and its members drifted across the road. Farney moved to his car to inspect the tire which had delayed him. It was soft again, and he dragged out a battered pump and fell doggedly to work.

The shabby automobiles around him shuddered to life, and coughed townward in swirls of leaden dust. When he had finished and screwed down the cap, the last one had twisted from sight, and the road lay quiet and empty. Down in the coulee two magpies hopped about the crumpled mass of wreckage. In the parched air the stains on the post were already fading to a rusty brown.

Farney wiped the perspiration from his eyes, and crossed the road slowly. He stooped and fumbled a moment in the dust.

"A right good pair of pliers, a-goin' to waste!"

He slipped them into the hip-pocket of his dingy overalls.

FORT BURTON grilled in fierce midday heat under her scraggly cottonwoods when Farney swung out of the mouth of the coulee, and headed back toward town.

Heat waves shimmered over the naked earth before him, dissolving squat stores and houses into dizzy mirages. A gaunt grain elevator beyond the railway station was all a-wriggle against the dusty sky. Even the heavy old wooden-trussed bridge spanning the Missouri trembled uneasily above the sullen water.

Main Street, at the far end of the bridge, lay curiously deserted and empty. There had been, Farney recalled, talk of an immediate inquest, and presently as he clattered over the loose planks he could see the cars which had preceded him clustered on a side street where Lawton had his Mortuary Parlors.

The pool-hall, fortunately, was abandoned and quiet. Only Tony Minotti lounged in his barber chair in the front corner, gazing idly out into the hot, empty street. Farney drew up at the curb and slipped across the glaring sidewalk. He had been resigned to forego his one luxury, were Painter's establishment thronged and buzzing with gossip. But the long low room held no one but the little barber. Farney settled gratefully into the chair, and passed a calloused hand over his week-old beard.

He was stretched on his back, face masked with lather, when Painter and the others swarmed in from the inquest. The pool-hall keeper was still importantly busy with his story of the driver impaled upon the post. Farney tried to ignore the tiresome prattle, but the insistent voice jangled in his ears.

Painter dragged out the last morbid detail of his discovery, then swung rantingly to the theme of the evil lurking in the effects of those who have suffered violent death.

Farney fidgeted uncomfortably. Tony had finished stropping his razor, and stood waiting for his customer to settle down.

"The sunburn on the neck, it smarts a little from the lather?" he suggested.

"Somethin' in my overalls gougin' into me," mumbled Farney in reply. He slid a hand under his hip, and eased the contents of the pocket higher up.

"—'nd he sez here's a right good pair of pliers a-goin' to waste, 'nd I sez yeh, I see 'em when I first come, 'nd I let 'em lay. I let 'em lay, I sez, 'cause I see with my own eyes what happened to Buck 'nd him not cold yit—"

Farney had to listen now, or scrape the mask off his face, and get up and say something.

"—'nd he laughed like he was 'shamed of hisself 'nd dropped 'em back all right I kin tell you 'nd scuffed 'em over with dust, 'nd they're layin' there yit 'nd everybody a —— sight better off—"

Painter's voice ceased abruptly. Tony had finished shaving one side of Farney's face, and was slapping his razor briskly on the strop. Some one laughed nervously.

Farney lifted his head, and saw in the mirror that he had suddenly been recognized. He squirmed uneasily, undecided what to say or do.

As he wriggled, something slid from the chair beneath him, and fell to the floor with a faint metallic clash. There was a startled gasp from Painter. Then Tony stooped over and straightened up.

"The automobile pliers," he remarked, brightly, "they fall out of the overalls pocket. The nice, new automobile pliers—I put them here by the mug till I finish the face and you get up."

JAMES FARNEY had spoken the truth when he said he was not superstitious. Yet he came away from the pool-hall filled with a vague uneasiness.

He cared not a snap of the fingers for any one's forebodings. His days were too crowded with sod-breaking, chores and "batching it" in a shack on the face of the prairie for speculation on the occult or the supernatural.

He struggled against elemental forces and was accustomed to mishaps. He took them as things to be expected in a new country where the grass of centuries yielded only sullenly to dry-land wheat. Others might shake their heads ominously over cows struck down by lightning or work-horses bitten by rattlesnakes. Farney accepted such things, when they came his way, as annoying but natural, and went thriftily ahead, improvising makeshifts, working hard, not worrying about things he could not see or feel. Eventually he would get on, and getting on was the only important thing to James Farney. It meant some one from back home in Iowa to do his cooking and share his loneliness.

He was not superstitious, but he was sensitive. For all his diffidence he had a deep and stubborn pride. Painter had turned his first gasp of chagrin into a "dead man's luck," uttered in a hollow voice with eyes averted. Then he had pulled away silently with the others to the rear of the long room.

Farney could see them there, peering and talking in low tones, when he arose and pocketed the pliers, and his first forthright impulse was to confront the group and scoff at its beliefs.

But the thought of his own furtive act in the coulee set the blood burning in his temples. So much fuss over such a little thing! For a moment he had to fight a childish desire to hurl the pliers full in the midst of those whispering faces. Then he fumbled in a purse, paid for his shave, and left the hall.

He came straight away from town, and the curious mixture of shame and exasperation with which he had turned tail to men weaker than himself came with him.

It stayed with him, annoyingly, back across the brooding river, eddying hungrily about the splintered piers; across the flat where whirling dust-devils got up and danced before him; past the fork in the road, and along the seamy faces of old gray hills.

Then his route swung abruptly into the mouth of a second coulee, and squirmed upward along broken slopes all gashed and gullied by forgotten rains. And there the feeling left him, relieved rather than otherwise, in the face of a situation with which he knew how to deal.

The road bent quickly about the shoulder of a small steep hill. As Farney rounded the curve he came upon a dislodged boulder scarcely larger than his head. It lay in the track before him, and he flirted the steering wheel instinctively to avoid the jolt. But he was too close upon the obstruction to avoid it, and his front wheel met the rock at an awkward slant. There was a sharp shock, and the car, lurching obstinately to the left, nosed gently into the hillside, and came to rest.

Farney climbed out and appraised the situation—two cracked spokes and a bent steering-rod.

He burrowed under the car, and straightened the rod easily enough with a wrench and a hammer. He was still prone in the dirt, busy about the spokes, when help came upon the scene.

It came in the person of one of the men whom Farney had noticed in the pool-hall—a shiftless fellow named Pennick, with a homestead of sorts a mile out on South Bench. The newcomer breasted the curve in a car even shabbier than the one burrowing into the hillside. At the sight of the canted automobile with its driver lying beside it, his eyes started from his head.

Farney, rising on one elbow, enjoyed the fellow's consternation. Pennick swerved widely as he passed, pushed down the throttle, and for a moment seemed bent on fleeing from the spot. Then he brought his car to a stop, and climbed out almost fearfully.

Farney was amused, and then faintly annoyed by the apprehension in the other's manner.

"Are you hurt bad?" Pennick faltered in a voice that trembled audibly.

"I ain't hurt at all," Farney answered. "I'm fixin' a couple of spokes."

Pennick gulped, unable to accept the statement.

"You had an accident," he finally accused.

"I bumped a rock, 'nd it nosed me into the hillside. If you push up front while I throw her in reverse, she'll pull herself back on the road."

Pennick stared at the car, and then across the roadway.

"If you'd happened to turn the other way, 'stead of toward the hill, you might be down there in the gully, underneath the car."

"Guess again," said Farney dryly. "I was goin' slow 'nd would've stopped her long before she hit the edge. Anyway the stone was in the inside track 'nd throwed me over toward the hillside."

Pennick still stared down into the dry watercourse where yellow rocks like old snaggy teeth thrust out of the flaking dirt.

"You'd a-been down there underneath the car, 'nd there'd a-been another inquest."

"Don't be a fool," said Farney. "Git 'round front 'nd push while I put her in reverse."

There was no need after all for Pennick's half-hearted pushing. The car, under its own power, came readily back into the road. There was no need either for Pennick to stand there hesitating, like a man eager and yet unwilling to be on his way.

"Well, much obliged," said Farney, stiffly, "long's you're ahead of me, you pull out first."

Pennick, fidgeting in the road, showed no further signs of moving. An evasive look had come into his little eyes.

"Naw, I ain't in no hurry. You better

pull past me 'nd go first. You got further to go than I got."

Farney grunted and shoved down on the low-gear pedal. At the bench-top he leaned out to see how his companion was faring on the grade. Pennick had turned around at the first wide spot in the roadway, and was coasting rapidly back toward town. Farney halted his car, and watched the other careen around the turns and straighten out along the bluffs at thirty miles an hour.

And finally his slow imagination contrived to picture Pennick's breathless arrival at the pool-hall with his silly precious news of the preliminary workings of dead man's luck.

JAMES FARNEY'S imagination, for all its limitations, did manage to sense the zest Pennick's news would add to Painter's story.

But it fell far short in estimating the speed with which that story was to run about.

Seely, the rural carrier, had it all by morning, and Dutchy Schultz, a neighbor, by mid-afternoon.

By Sunday people going by to the services at the schoolhouse were staring hard at Farney plowing as they rattled past. And later, when the services were ended, and the dusty cars were coughing past again, people were leaning out and gesticulating to one another at the sight of Farney, horses halted in a furrow, mending a broken doubletree with baling-wire.

Stripped to its bare facts, the thing was as ordinary and simple as the summary Farney set down that night in his letter back to Iowa. There had been an accident near town on a bad piece of road in a coulee—man killed, a flighty fellow taking chances with poor brakes. A fellow was foolish to be taking needless chances. Picked up a right good pair of pliers—handy thing to have around—when things were getting old and worn out they were always breaking and needing mending. You could do a lot with pliers and baling-wire.

As simple as that, for all the fuss that had been made about it! And Farney sought and regained his old singleness of purpose in his closing lines. He was working hard. Things were coming along pretty well in spite of the dry weather. There was bound to be rain before long, and if it came in time, why, perhaps they could figure on next June.

But, struggling with pen and ink on the oilcloth-covered table, he was reckoning without the community of which he was an unobtrusive part—a vaguely superstitious, sharply curious community, starving for gossip—with a self-important pool-hall keeper bent on supplying it and keeping it alive.

He had failed to understand how a community once faintly friendly could sit in judgment upon one who flaunted its beliefs. Nor had he appreciated at all the prying impatience with which so many people set themselves eagerly to witness the working out of Fate.

Understanding these things was a task reserved for the days that followed, and Farney's sensitiveness made it a hard and painful one. It was distressing to so modest a man to be talked about, peered at and spied upon as he went about his normal, fallible business. But he could and did become accustomed to that in time. The difficult thing was to see heads wagged and a dire significance attached to a blackened thumb-nail, a horse cut in the barbed wire, or a blown-out tire.

James Farney had never made anything of his minor mishaps. He made nothing of them now, except to check them over and assure himself that their number and their importance was neither more nor less than they had been before. But he winced and suffered under the attention they attracted.

He went cautiously about everything he did, that there might be no chance for further gossip. He kept to himself and worked harder than before. He went to town, where the whispering tongues and peering eyes seemed multiplied in every group on the sidewalk, only when he was forced to go to bring out supplies.

He went about his business in town quietly, head up, eyes turned neither to the right nor left. He kept close to the stores where he traded, and away from the pool-hall, and did his business quickly, and left the town.

But however much his face might burn at the thought of his thrifty, furtive act in the coulee, and at its discovery as he lay in Tony Minotti's chair, a deep-rooted pride kept the pliers in his pocket, their handles thrusting visibly into public view, glinting brightly in the pitiless sunlight, a stubborn challenge to the devious gods of lesser men.

FORT BURTON had some justification for its superstitions, and its faith in signs and portents.

A country whose vagaries were so beyond all charting needed some less savage equivalent of the old Indian beliefs in good and evil "medicine."

Purple clouds, thrusting into a clear sky from behind a shoulder of the Highwood Mountains, became sudden clashing hailstorms which shredded fields to pulp and vanished completely in a quarter-hour. Hot winds stole up through some mysterious defile far to the south, withered the growing wheat in a day, and were followed by killing frosts twenty-four hours later. Mild chinooks, in the dead of winter, crept over the snowy wastes at night, and melted knee-deep snow by morning.

"Acts of God" were common, and as capricious as acts of God should always be. Thus the deluge which descended steadily for two days somewhere along the upper reaches of the great river, and presently poured its swollen bulk down past the parching town.

Overhead the sky had been empty of clouds for weeks, and the sun flamed like a molten ball of copper through a pall of gritty dust. Dust, ankle-deep, filled all the roads and swept about in choking, blinding whirlwinds. Dust lay thickly in the streets of Fort Burton, right up to the barren banks along which the turgid water raced.

Fort Burton knew the floods of spring with sullen ice cakes grumbling, and the June rise when the distant mountains tardily gave up their winter's snow. But Fort Burton had never known a flood like this at the height of the dry season, and, wading in dust, sweeping it off its sidewalks, clearing it from its throat at Painter's sticky soft-drink bar, the town enjoyed the sight of so much water roaring and tumbling by.

Fort Burton, parching, relished the spectacle of a river gone suddenly mad from over-gorging, and boasted of the sturdiness of the old bridge, standing impassive above the delirious stream. People emptied out of store and home and pool-hall to line the bank and the rail of the bridge, and watch the garnerings of hundreds of miles of watershed go raging by.

They were so intent on watching the river that they scarcely noticed James Farney when he swung across the flat where water would soon be turning the dust to sticky gumbo, rattled over the bridge, and parked his car along the curb.

But Fort Burton, at least that part of it which clustered around Painter near the rail of the middle span, did notice Farney a few moments later when he moved out on the bridge to stare curiously at the muddy, foam-flecked welter swirling beneath his dusty feet. The group on the bridge was already a little apprehensive at the sight of so much ruthless power, and at the faint trembling with which the bridge met the assault upon its battered piers. It noticed Farney, and shrank slightly from him.

Painter put the feeling into action. He turned and started back toward solid ground.

"Hey, Painter, you skeered the bridge'll go down," called some one.

"No, I ain't skeered of the bridge itself, but I ain't aimin' to be on it with no Jonah."

It was spoken in a loud voice to carry above the hissing of the water, and James Farney heard and flushed. For a moment he played with the pleasant idea of seizing the pool-hall keeper and dropping him over the rail into the water. A mouthful or two of that muddy, foam-flecked torrent down below would shut the fellow up for good and all. Then he turned and made his way alone back along the plank roadway. Jonah or no Jonah, the pliers still protruded from his pocket, and he took a lonely, stubborn consolation in the thought that Painter and the others could not fail to see them, flaunting his independence, in their silly faces.

Painter wasn't scared, without a Jonah, nor were the half-dozen others who remained with him. The old bridge with its great wooden trusses resting solidly upon piles driven to bed-rock had stood for years above the worst the river had to offer.

They were not really scared at the sight of the snag which came ducking and bobbing into sight around the curve above the town. It floated broadside to the current, a great old cottonwood, torn from the bank and hurried protestingly down the stream. As it advanced, it rolled slowly over and over. Its widespread roots threshed clear of the water, thrust up jerkily like the arms of a drowning man, disappeared, thrust up again.

They were not frightened, but they winced a little when the tree brought up with a sullen shock against the center pier. Its roots reached out and clutched at the piling, and caught and hung. Lesser trees and branches, borne down on the current, came to tangle themselves in its boughs, and to wedge themselves into the uneasy mass. The bridge took on a sharper, jerkier trembling. There came a motion that was less a tremble than a lurch. A stirring as of pain ran through the structure.

Now Painter and the others were scared. Their fear lent wings to their feet along that staggering roadway toward the suddenly horror-stricken group on shore. They fled with frantic haste over drunken planking that tilted suddenly beneath them, so that they must claw their way upward on hands and knees.

No running now. Nothing to do but clamber desperately upward as the span slid lower and lower into the flood, and rolled heavily under the impact of the water, and ducked and plunged, and staggered down the stream.

JAMES FARNEY was late on the scene again, and had missed the first appalling details.

From the bridge he had gone straight about his shopping, bent upon getting out of town and across the flat before it should be overflowed. He was in the grocery store, finishing his purchases, when he heard the crash of yielding timbers and the outcry in the street.

By the time he reached the sidewalk the crowd was already racing by, following the low-floating span with its frantic human freight down the river.

"They're all right if they hang on," he heard some one shouting, "it'll ground ag'in the bank when it hits a turn."

But there was scant truth in the prophecy. The span grounded long before it hit the turn. Riding deep in the water, it came to uneasy rest in mid-channel, hung up on what was normally a gravel bar. Now the bar was a raging rapids, sucked down at the lower end into the deep water where an old ferry had once plied. The deep water had become a sullen, greedy whirlpool, spinning silently beneath the rusty ferry cable which still sagged above the hungry stream.

They were all right so long as they hung on—and they hung on desperately, shouting uselessly across the water, avoiding the sight of the rapids beneath them, and the gulping whirlpool, and the thought of the gravel bar, their anchor, scouring out slowly under the swift onrush of the current.

There was a moment of stunned silence in the crowd on the bank, and then confusion. Some one shouted for a rope, although no arm could fling a rope that far. Then a cry for a boat was taken up and ran along the bank from one impotent mouth to another. And finally there was, unaccountably, a boat. It was an old, battered duck boat, the only craft the town could muster, dragged from a haymow somewhere and carried to the river bank.

It lay, flimsy and frail, beside the leaping water—a boat with oars for any one who cared to row. It rested there on the bank, empty, sprinkled with dry, dusty chaff from the haymow, while shamefaced men hung one behind another, and thought of being heroes, and hung back.

And then, while they waited, and the figures clinging to the rocking span shouted and waved their arms, there was James Farney, who wanted nothing but to work and save and to be let alone—James Farney with dead man's luck hovering over his head, with his defiance of dead man's luck thrusting from his pocket, making his way purposefully through the crowd.

And presently there was James Farney, with a stout cord tied to his wrist, in that cockle shell upon the hurrying water, toiling doggedly at the unaccustomed oars.

They watched him carried down by the swift rush of water, and paid out the line as he crept farther and farther out into the stream. And then suddenly there was no longer any boat, only James Farney clinging to a mass of wreckage, borne down upon the grounded span.

They watched him struggle up on the span, and join the others. He reeled in the line which had parted somewhere along its course. He fashioned it into a coil, and took some object from his pocket. He whirled it on the cord about his head. It glittered in the sun as it flew high above the river, and arched over the ferry cable, and dangled in mid-air.

Now there were other men to help, and presently one of them slid out from shore in a sling hanging from a pulley on the cable. He fastened a light rope to the cord sagging back to the span, and paid it out as James Farney drew it in with a heavier rope following.

And now there were men gloating and pounding one another on the back as the rescued, one by one, came safely ashore over their aerial pathway.

No talk of dead men now, but of live men, white and shaken, safe on shore, watching the span root free from the bar, and wallow through the rapids, and duck from sight in the whirlpool, and shake itself clear, and stagger on.

Talk of live men, saved by the hero Farney who stood staring at an object some one had thrust reverently into his hand.

He stood like a man in a daze, shivering slightly in his sodden clothes, holding the pliers from which a length of cord still dangled. He shook himself like a man awakening from unpleasant dreams. Then he stared at his wet clothes, at the river, at a bit of wreckage which might have been a duck boat, circling idly in an eddy near the shore.

"A —— fool," he muttered, "takin' foolish chances."

He stared again at the pliers in his hand, and a dull flush mounted his neck and flamed in his temples. So much fuss over such a little thing! So much foolishness to prove there was no truth in Painter's warning! The flush deepened, and he hurled the pliers from him. They landed with a dull plop, sinking deeply in the heavy dust. He stamped them over to smother the irony of their glitter.

But now a dozen men sprang forward to retrieve them, scrambling on hands and knees in the choking dust. They fought on the ground like schoolboys for possession of the precious pliers as Painter, dirty and disheveled, crawled from the tangle clutching them tightly in his hand.

TRADITION

by Leonard H. Nason

OF THE many people, sailors and landlubbers, who have admired the details of the American naval uniform, few know the origin of its characteristic details. Once upon a time an enthusiastic ensign explained them to a gathering of open-mouthed recruits, of which the writer was one. The three white stripes around the collar of the jumper, explained the ensign, were borrowed from the British Navy, and were worn by them in commemoration of Nelson's three great victories; Copenhagen, the Nile and Trafalgar. The black handkerchief the sailors wear so entrancingly was also borrowed from the British, who wore it first as a sign of mourning for Nelson's death. At the time, one of the open-mouthed recruits thought it strange that the American Navy should take kindly to wearing marks commemorative of British victories, or signs of mourning for British admirals.

The aforesaid open-mouthed recruit will now arise and say that the foregoing traditions, however interesting and widely believed, are bunk. In the first place the wide collar of the jumper was worn to keep the sailor's queue from getting his jumper all grease. The three stripes around it are a decoration, and have no more significance than the buttons on a marine's cuff. In Bayonne, France, there is a contemporary painting of some of Bayonne's privateers of Napoleon's time, and the sailors wear three stripes on their collars. Far be it from them to commemorate Trafalgar and the Nile. As to the handkerchief, it was worn to be tied around the forehead, to keep hair and perspiration out of a man's eyes, and it has been black from time immemorial, not as a sign of mourning, but so that it would not show the dirt.

Gordon Young

Who gave us the unforgetable "Days of Forty-Nine"

Continues his New *Romance of the* South Seas

TREASURE

LIANFO was a copra port. The steamer came but once a month, when it came regularly, which was not usual; so, not hearing much of the outside world, the inhabitants chattered over and over of the small happenings in their midst.

Three men were lying on the beach, facing the dark water. One of these men was Old Bill Barnes, bearded and talkative as a parrot, as full of repetition. Another was Old Tom Wateman, thin, small, bandy-legged; a crabbed man with red-rimmed eyes. The other was a lazy young beach-comber by the name of Raeburn, Jack Raeburn. For a long time they had been shipmates on the *Dragon*, a black-hulled schooner; Will Heddon, master.

Heddon stood above six feet, was wide of shoulders and heavy of fists; he hated the islands, natives, climate, but loved the sea, and the wild, tricky life of an island dodger.

He once had business dealings with a man named Walscher, one of the rich men of Lianfo. Of course Walscher got the best of him, which later led to Heddon's flattening him out. But he soon learned that on Lianfo a rich man's flesh could not be abused. Magistrate Davies—"Porpoise Davy," Heddon called him—was Walscher's good friend. Walscher, being a business man, cast an eye on Heddon's schooner. It was libeled—attached.

The three seamen were talking of this, and of T'eeay Layeen, the Chinese pirate. A remarkable fellow, people said; tall and dark-eyed, with the look of royalty in his bearing; possessor of great treasure, too. But then, Heddon was said to know of an island of treasure, the existence of which he would neither affirm nor deny. People called him a deep 'un.

Denasso, the opium-smoking musician of a miserable troupe of show people who were stranded on Lianfo, came to Heddon with a message. Vioux, their manager—who was completely dominated by his snake-charmer, Madame, and Abdul, the Human Bull, a strong man—was in trouble. He had brought a Chinese slave-girl, Po-Shu, to the island and now Porpoise Davy had her. Heddon asked where they had found her.

"Madame found her in Sydney," said Denasso, smilingly. "How or where I don't know. Really don't. It doesn't matter. Lovely child, Po-Shu, what?"

But Vioux would say: "My daughter, monsieurs, by my firs' wife. Ah, a marveelous woman, my firs' wife!"

There were Chinese who wanted her, too; so Vioux gave Heddon a great diamond he had stolen from Madame, as a price to kidnap Po-Shu and take them all to the mainland. Heddon pounded the thick bottom of an empty gin bottle on a piece of scrap iron, threw the glass into a chamois sack with the diamond, and persuaded Walscher to accept security for his lien on the *Dragon*, giving him the one diamond. Talk of Heddon's treasure was revived, and men of the beach planned to stow away on the *Dragon* when she sailed.

That night Magistrate Davies was dozing on his porch, when the kidnapers arrived. Heddon tried to talk him into giving up the girl; insults and reason, logic and jeers, meant nothing to Porpoise Davy. When he was finally tied up, his timid wife, begging mercy for him, led them to Po-Shu's room.

A gust of wind through an open window set shadows dancing as the flame flickered.

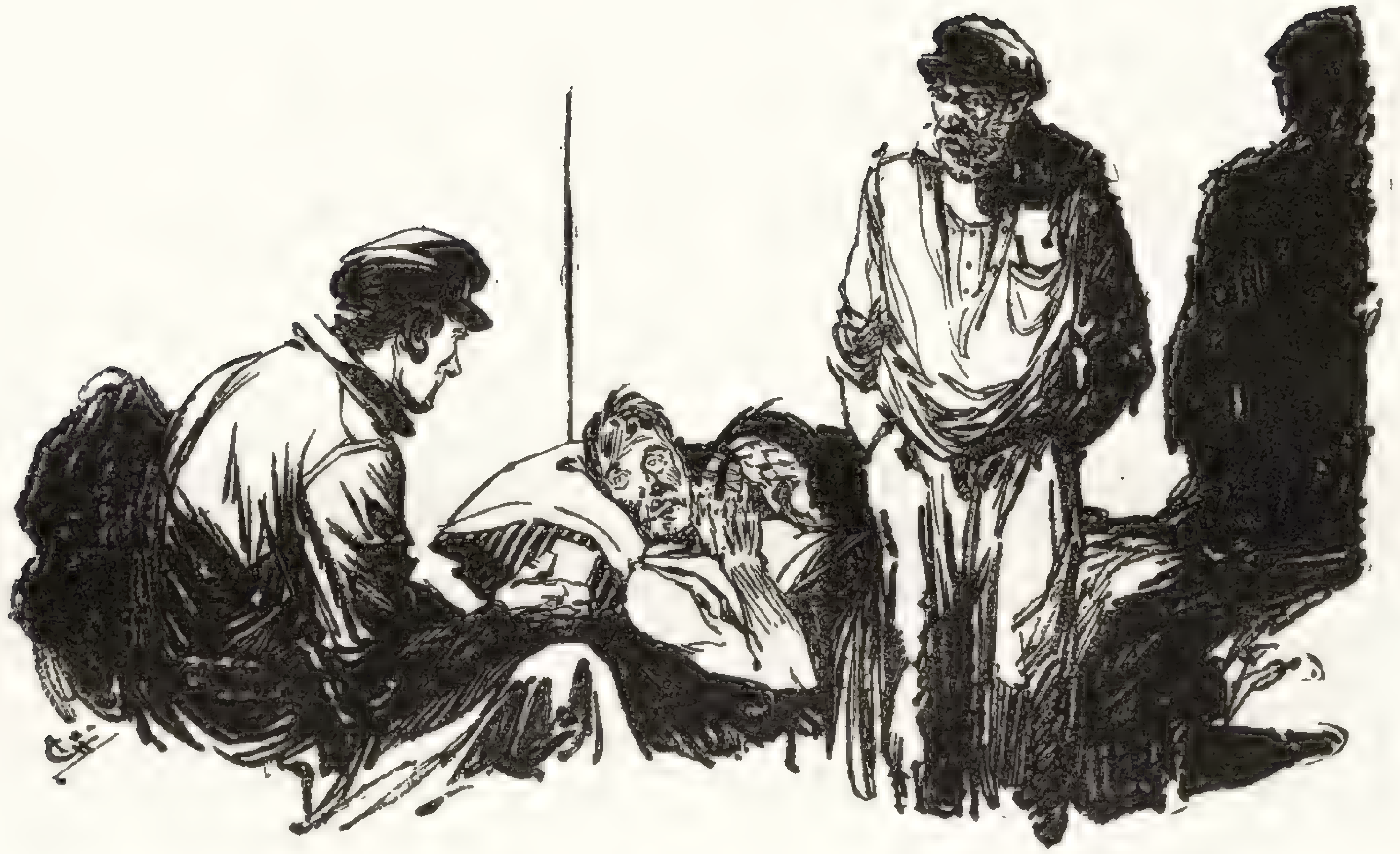
"Po-Shu? Po-Shu?" Denasso called coaxingly. Heddon, holding the lamp high in one hand, turned to the bed and bent over it.

"She's gone!" he said. "Been gone—the bed's cold! Looks like the Chinks got her."

So they laid Mrs. Davies on the cot, tying her down with strips of torn sheeting. She understood their need of time in their getaway and was thankful that they had not hurt her husband.

"We'll leave him high and dry," promised Heddon. As they lurched through the darkness, Heddon shouted:

"Treasure," copyright, 1926, by Gordon Young



"We've some luck anyhow, Jack! There'll be wind enough for our hurry."

Once aboard the ship, after fighting through the rain and bluster of that storm-swept night, the men were turned to. Even Abdul was forced to the capstan, though Heddon had to knock him out first. After a tense half-hour the schooner was put over the bar, in pursuit of the Chinese ship, thought to carry Po-Shu.

Vioux and Madame questioned Will Heddon about his knowledge of treasure. He told them:

"See here, if I knew of treasure would I bang and bat about in these islands, stealing shell an' doing a tramp's odd jobs, when with little more than the glint of gold one could live at ease in, say Paris? You're all fools over that treasure yarn. If there'd been a smell of treasure I'd have dug for it long ago."

Then a sudden uproar broke out on the deck above; the stowaways were out! A fierce fight took place for possession of the *Dragon*, ending with Heddon and his crew in charge of a wrecked schooner; topmast, foresail and jib in a jumble on deck. Pelew, ringleader of the beach gang, walked aft to Will Heddon and said:

"Nothin' left to fight for, mister, but a dismasted tub as won't sail."

"You'll all get to the pumps," said Heddon. "With the boats smashed we'll keep afloat as long as possible."

Madame's great snake, Baal-Phelgor, had the entire crew in terror. Heddon held his distance with the rest but ordered it kept alive for his own ends.

The following morning dawn came with a murky glow, filtering through the rain. Walscher's *Jack-Girl* was expected to show up and carry them back to Lianfo and prison, but the first thing sighted was a long-boat. Pelew, in the shrouds with binoculars, suddenly shouted:

"Look! By ——, they're Chinks! Looks like we had a new lot of pumpers comin' aboard!"

As they drew near, a tall finely built Chinese was seen in the stern—steering and sculling. The boat pulled alongside and Madame, at the rail, screamed:

"Po-Shu! In the boat there. You will see!"

Denasso was putting in a plea for the protection of the slave-girl from Vioux and Madame when his gaze was drawn shoreward. The *Jack-Girl* was bearing out from Lianfo.

Heddon quickly laid plans for his followers, saying to Old Bill:

"You and Tom can't face prison. You must turn witness against me, understand?"

"Me? Me and Tom! Turn agin ye, Will 'Eddon? Not to save yer worthless soul from ——, we wouldn't!"

And the lazy young Raeburn was just as indignant.

With a frown Heddon turned to watch the Chinese coming aboard. Po-Shu was handed over the side and ran to him, sheltering from Madame's wrath at his side. Will called to the tall Chinese:

"You savvy me talkee? This *nu-ken*. What for you stealum her?"

With but a slight accent the answer came:

"To me was given a ship and men if I would take her from a house. It was the ship, not this woman, that I wanted. The ship sank—"

Denasso drew Raeburn to one side and whispered:

"That Chink—Po-Shu just told me—*T'eeay Layeen!*"

Raeburn, astonished at this new development, rejoined Heddon with the hope of warning him. They were planning to capture the *Jack-Girl*, and Heddon proposed that they turn the snake on Walscher.

Soon the *Jack-Girl* hailed them and sent her boat to take them off. The snake, securely boxed, went with Madame. The next boat-load carried Heddon, who, in the ensuing fight, was chiefly concerned with keeping Pelew from killing any one. As it turned out the snake was not loosed, as Madame protested so strongly as to lose her wig in the tussle. She ran to hide her shame in a cabin, dodging the struggling men.

The Chinaman fought with a knife, wary as a cat, and seemed everywhere at once. The fight was fierce, but brief, and soon the *Jack-Girl's* crew threw down their weapons in surrender and stood dejectedly in the rain.

After settling affairs on their new craft, T'eeay Layeen and Heddon came to an understanding. T'eeay had promised Pelew and the men that he would lead them to treasure, and the Chinese, fearing treachery from the crew, ordered his coolie attendants to watch over Heddon constantly.

Two nights had passed when the *Rose Marie*, a labor-recruiting schooner, hove into hearing. The impetuous Pelew jumped to the rail and shouted:

"We're pirates, you ol' nigger-catcher! An' here's Say Lean, the Chink pirate."

So when the captain of the *Rose Marie* had taken Walscher and the others aboard he opened fire with rifles, while Heddon and Pelew drove the men aloft. A sudden squall split the schooner's main-sail and carried the bark to safety.

Old Bill, badly wounded in the first fight, was cheerfully being nursed by all. Old Tom was even carving him crutches, though not much hope was held for his recovery.

The Chink's treasure was the chief topic talked of among the crew.

Late that afternoon Heddon came to Old Tom with word that Madame had regained her wig and was once more on deck.

"The minute I saw her, I went to throw her *babee*, Baal-Phelgor, overboard. Thank God, her door was locked. When I looked through a port I saw he was loose. Guess she's looking for some one to feed to the —— snake!"

MADAME did indeed have a new look in her black eyes, new anger and purpose in her head. She was bitter as a scotched snake; yet kept her poise, had even more poise than ever.

No woman at all, no man in all her life but the wig-maker, had ever known of her baldness; and from long and jealous nursing, this secret had become an obsession, a mania. Her own rageful feeling was comparable to that of those myth-women, who are serpents but assume lovely female shapes; yet are subject to accidental disenchantment— a word, a stroke, a wizard's penetrative glance, and the disguise withers.

She was so hateful of her own baldness that never within her own bedchamber would she look into her own mirror with her head uncovered. The feeling was unreasonable, but it was her feeling.

Now when any one glanced toward her she thought that he thought of her baldness; when she heard half drunken laughter or jeering shout, she thought men jested about her. Brooding and angered in her room, she had heard through the port Heddon more than once call her "snake woman."

The negro Zudag was her man; Abdul too, and moreover he did not like Heddon; Denasso, slave to the oil-lamp that warms the pea ball of opium, must, if she willed it, even now bow when she spoke; and as for Vioux, he had many faults, or rather only one—that of cowardice; yet even his small body would add weight to mutiny; and though they had recently quarreled, they had quarreled many times before and she was quite used to wrapping and unwrapping him about her fingers.

Madame was a woman who all of her life had schemed and planned, and though much of this turned out unluckily, some went well; and she had audacity.

She had spied on the deck through a port hole, watchfully; so, very well aware of what she was about, she chose to make her first appearance on deck during Pelew's watch. She glanced at him, spoke of the weather, seemed friendly though she walked aside and stood with a lonely air.

Presently he came near with awkward pretext of pointing to a sunset's beauty. Pelew cared for a sunset's beauty about as much as he cared for the beauty of a fried egg, and had thought Old Tom somewhat cracked for gaping at the sun when it went down. Now Madame was responsive; she followed his pointing finger as it was poked at this and that cloud, and she commented in rapid phrases on the changing lights.

Soon Pelew was talking of himself. She listened attentively, said:

"*Magnifique!*—Oo so saveege!—Monsieur, you haf ze treasure of ze brave heart! —Oh how ver' mooch one could trus' you in ze fight wiz any man!"

IV

THE *Jack-Girl* with one thing and another began to make men feel that she was not a lucky ship; in the forecastle men began to speak jokingly of a Jonah, and soon to speak of a Jonah as if they believed in it; then determinedly, and said of course it could be nothing else than that blank-blasted snake.

Even good food and much splicing of the

main brace, with the glint of treasure like a will o' the wisp, did not keep the men from increase of superstitious uneasiness. Shorthanded, they were banged about by bad weather; and much of the time when not hove-to against a storm, were hove-to in a fair wind making repairs.

A squall caught Pelew one night while he was too much interested in Madame to have his eyes open; a backstay carried away and the main topmast was sprung. Only the luck of the squall, being one whoop and hardly more, kept all the top hamper from coming down. The men, during the long hours of work at shortening up the topmast and rigging, talked grumbling of the "Joner."

A few days later they plunged into a gale; the bark was pooped in scudding, flooding everything fore and aft, and breaking the shoulder of the man lashed at the wheel.

One thing and another went wrong, lesser accidents, all big enough to cause extra work; and their persistence exasperated the men until talk of "Joner" was no longer a joke. The only person who remained calm and evenly spoken was T'eeay Layeen, and the only fellow to be cheerful was Woo Lung, the cook, who spoke pidgin-English to the sailors and in the Mandarin tongue to T'eeay Layeen.

What discouraged men thought at the time must surely be the end of the unlucky bark came when fire broke out. How it started no one knew; but the guess was that a sailor or two prowling about in the hold to see what they could find worth poaching had left a match or candle aglow. It was the sort of thing to which nobody would confess. They got the fire out, or at least the flames, but had anxious days and nights from charring wood that seemed inextinguishable without flooding the hold.

"Which," said Heddon, "would be as good a way as any to sink her. And I'm ready to do it. Sink her, I mean!"

Every man of the crew was frazzled; but Heddon, though nearly worn out, became more and more jeeringly bitter, and for all the forecastle could tell to the contrary, he too believed that the snake had brought bad luck but that the Frenchwoman was the real "Joner." At least he said so.

Where they were going no one knew except T'eeay Layeen. He had said to Heddon:

"You get to Kyo, eh? Little island, big smoke mountain."

Heddon, after pawing through two big volumes of sailing directions in the chart room, said:

"Kyo? That's no good to us. God may have made the world, but Englishmen have named most of it."

At last by patiently turning every page and glancing through the black-faced paragraph headings, he discovered "Taylor (Kyo) Island"; then followed the island's position and a brief description. It was a precipitous, uninhabited island with a smoking volcano, first reported in 1837 by Captain Taylor of the British ship *Rajah.*

There it was, with the position given in terms of latitude and longitude, without reference to its bearings from any other island.

"——!" said Heddon. "It lies to —— an'-gone in unfrequented water, not to have been reported until '37!"

And as he plotted the course past headlands, through straits and among islands that seemed thickly strewn as stars on a cloudless night, in addition to other worries about the ship, he found such warnings in the sailing directions as: "Tidal streams run with great strength." "The *Colas* experienced great difficulty in getting out of the strait against the west-going stream." "Dry sand-bank charted about five miles due east of Dimkin island, but its exact position is not determined." "Group of islands occupying a space twenty miles southwest and sixteen miles northeast that is entirely unexplored." "The mark must be watched very closely as there is but little room to admit of being swept off the line." "Repeatedly reported as an area subject to protracted calms."

"Luck rules all, and a little calm weather would be right welcome," said Heddon. And to Pelew: "You said the other day you wished you had some education and could navigate. I wish it too. Then it would be for you to do the worrying. The man that gets himself educated is a fool. He knows then that much more of what he doesn't know!"

Pelew regarded him with a blank look in his bold eyes, and, for once, thoughtfully said nothing.

He, being a shameless liar, like most men when they find a woman who seems to believe all they say, had said to Madame that he was as good a navigator as any man. And Madame, though a wise woman in some ways, knew but little of the sea, and believed him.

Heddon, at about this time, began to notice that whenever he appeared on watch, especially at night, the two Chink coolies would somehow get where they could watch him. At first he thought perhaps he was drinking too much brandy and was suspecting motive in what was merely accidental; but he kept his eyes open and saw that they did put themselves where they could watch him. He decided that perhaps they were looking for a quiet time to make trouble, and wondered the more because he knew they hardly sat down or stood up without being told to do so by T'eeay Layeen. They could understand no English and were useless about the deck, and dozed near the galley or in the passageway before T'eeay Layeen's room.

Almost every day, though he said but little, T'eeay Layeen had appeared to grow more and more friendly toward Heddon, as if with increase of admiration for his jeering, which was like good spirits and seemed to hearten men, and for the way he watched the ship.

"But Chinks are treacherous," said Heddon to himself.

So one night he loaded a revolver, thrust it well down into his waist band, put a marline-spike in his hip pocket, and took the trouble to get close to the two Chinks, turn his back and appear unwatchful. Nothing happened. After a time he staggered a bit, and leaned drunkenly against the mizzen. They did not approach him; but presently the noiseless T'eeay Layeen appeared, very erect and with a hawk-like brightness in his dark eyes. He spoke to Heddon, looked closely at him, and went away; but his voice had an impatient angry sound as he said something to the coolies that were slumped against the deck-house.

Heddon laughed quietly, and a minute later tossed the gun into a chart-house drawer.

"They told him I was drunk!"

About three nights later something happened that showed how very watchful those blank-faced dull-eyed coolies were.

Heddon and Tom Wateman used the room to starboard of the one Old Bill lay in; Po-Shu used that to port. Tom, whose head bubbled with ideas for Old Bill's care, saw how they could break through the bulkhead of the room the Chink girl used without disturbing the position of Old Bill's bed, which was fast against the starboard bulkhead. Thus with an open doorway between the rooms they would be nearer their sick shipmate—if Po-Shu would change rooms.

His head being filled with the idea, Old Tom spoke of it one night after supper to T'eeay Layeen, asking if the change could be made the next day; but T'eeay Layeen had the change made at once, which was readily done as there was little or nothing to be moved from one room to the other.

That night, instead of turning in after he turned the deck over to Old Tom at twelve o'clock, Heddon went into the chart-house and read sailing directions for an hour or two.

"Bill he's sleepin' tonight," said Tom, poking his head through the door. "An' you—you're bad as that Say Lean. He don't never sleep. An' I jus' run them two coolies for'ard. I won't have 'em prowlin' aft here behind my back!"

Heddon slapped the book shut, turned out the lamp and went along the deck to Old Bill's door, where he paused quietly, listening; then as a matter of habit he stepped into the next room to which he had been accustomed.

At once within the room there was an alarmed savage grunt. The night was dark, the room was black; Heddon could see nothing, but instinctively he swerved aside and felt the glancing blow of an outthrust arm, heard the knife point *click* against the wood behind him.

He caught at the arm, a smooth snaky arm, slippery with grease, and knew by the smell of the fellow that it was the negro Zudag. The arm slipped through his hand, but his hand closed down on the wrist which offered the better hold. A gasping cry came from Po-Shu, startled out of sleep.

Heddon slapped both hands to the wrist, jumped backward, wrenched the arm so that the knife fell away; and with an almost continuous movement stepped clear of the doorway, jerked the negro through, gave him a sling that sent him off his feet and skittering over the deck.

Instantly two shadows seemed to pounce upon the negro. He yelled brokenly in strange animal-like fright and pain, but was quickly silent; then there was the faint sound of bare feet running lightly as the shadow shapes vanished.

Old Tom appeared; others came and a light was fetched. In ten seconds the negro had been almost cut to pieces.

"Mister," said a man out of the crew, "it was for hittin' 'im that time when he had the chickens."

"But he was in that girl's room!" said another.

"But how'd he know they'd switched rooms? I didn't!"

"What you think, mister?"

"That I was a fool not to hold his throat till I'd squeezed the truth out of him!" said Heddon.

Pelew swore deeply, with a kind of baffled note in his voice. He did not like mysteries, and asked:

"But why'd them Chinks jump 'im like that! Who's to tell—they might jump any man of us? Somepin funny. I don't like it!"

T'eeay Layeen answered:

"That is right." He spoke slowly, and it was as if he spoke his warning to Pelew alone. "Any man that lifts a hand against him, dies!"

T'eeay Layeen, though a Chink, had a bearing that would have been impressive without the piratical legends about his name; and what he said was so unexpected, spoken so like an overlord whose word gave life and death, that some men momentarily eyed Heddon, thus singled out, with an expression of awed respect; but Pelew's blank look turned into one of suspicion.

"Why him more than me? Ain't I done my part too? Have you—say, look here, have you an' him got together to beat us fellers out? I feared you'd try as much, so now it's come, heh? See here, we ain't goin' have it! Are we, mates?"

Pelew turned expectantly to the men about him; but his shipmates made no answer, unless an uneasy silence and much shifting of bare feet might be taken as one. It was, in a way, answer enough. Between Heddon and Pelew there was no doubt as to the choice they would make. His insane bullying of them on the *Dragon* was not to be forgotten. Heddon jeered them, taunted them about treasure, and they were afraid of him; but they admired Heddon. They feared Pelew, perhaps even more; and hated him.

And now Pelew stood in the midst of utter silence and stared in baffled surprize. Only the ship sounds were heard, the cordage creak, pounding slap of water, whinny of the yard-slings. He did not understand it. At a word he would have been defiant, challenging. He was not awed, he was baffled. It was as if every man here knew of his secret with Madame: as they neared the treasure-place, Heddon was to be seized; he Raeburn and Old Tom, and were to be, perhaps, marooned; certainly to have no shares; and of course the Chinese were not to be left anything of the treasure.

Guilt was nothing new to Pelew, but a feeling of guilt was. Silence made him feel that these men knew. Had he been accused, he would have stormed, and have let the storm lead on to what it would. But silence was not answerable. He hesitated, started to turn and go away, then to call them all bad names; but no one spoke and many eyed him soberly; at last, impusively, he strode off. For a long minute no one spoke; then:

"Vell," said the ponderous Abdul, scowling, popping his eyes at Heddon, "some day I von't kill you—I chust beadt der life oudt of you. But dot Berlew, I don't like him needter. He call me tam sqvareheadt too much."

V

THE *Jack-Girl* bucked into bad weather that caused Madame to return to her stateroom and stay there; that, and the way Heddon had said to her:

"You're a good one at guessing what's in people's minds. Was that nigger after me or the Chink girl?"

"*Monsieur!*"

"You say it well, and look it, too! Indignant, I mean. I've your word for it that at times you tell the truth to make a man think the better of you. Try it now. If he was after me it's not so bad as if you sent him to cut the throat of a child asleep!"

Enraged, Madame cried out with a flare of words some of which Heddon understood, others that he did not.

"Madame," said Heddon, "never swear at a gentleman in the gutter tongue. He doesn't understand what you say. It's so much effort wasted."

She gave him a look that would have killed a man who was easily frightened, then rushed away, unlocked her room, disappeared within and did not reappear for many days.

"Which," said Heddon, "is too bad she's staying in that stuffy room. The weather's such that out here on deck she might be washed overboard!"

"Will—Will Heddon," Tom replied, blinking with a kind of red-eyed puzzlement, "it ain't like you to mistreat wimen so."

"Well, I've got so much admiration for her that I'll poke a gun under Old Bill's mattress. I think she's so remarkable a woman that she might even jam courage enough into Vioux to stab a dying man in the dark!"

"He ain't dyin', Will!"

"Aye! But as for that—" Heddon eyed him savagely—"we're all dying! The minute life begins, death starts in. An' every step you take from the first diapered toddle out of a cradle to the last doddering wiggle on a cane is but a part of the man's march straight to Hell. And by the feeling in my bones, we're nearly there!"

"You're drunk! You're drunk!" said Old Tom, a little anxiously.

"You're a liar. I quit the bottle when that nigger died. There's too many other dangerous things to watch out for without keeping an eye on my belly's deep-water mark. No, Tom, I'm sober, too —— sober. For one thing, I want to keep my neck out o' the crook of Abdul's arm. He's a big enough fool to jump me, big enough man to knock the Chinks overboard if they jump him. Oh, this is a madhouse —— right!"

"Ye've got no fear from him, Will. He's promised me, not till we git ashore. It hurts his pride how you capsized 'im, sudden. He says that he can lick ye, Will. An' I'm afeared he can."

"Afeared he can, eh? Well, so am I! He's lost a lot of fat since I boarded him. He's big as three Dutchmen, stubborn as a half dozen little ones. See—now, Tom, you see if you can't get dot Berlew to call him a tam sqvare-headt some more. Maybe like Kilkenny cats they'll eat each other up!"

"Pelew, he's changed queer, Will. He hardly talks at all, an' that means somethin' wrong!"

VI

THERE was no doubt now in the minds of the men forward that the *Jack-Girl* was "Jonered." Murder had been done. They eyed the Chink coolies respectfully, and were uneasy; approved of what had been done, but had the feeling that they might not approve of what the Chinks did next.

Yet there was some satisfaction in the feeling that it was the shadow of the Chink knives that made Pelew more quiet. He cursed them, of course, at times; but was mostly sullen. They drew apart and left him to himself.

The "Joner" showed itself too in the bad weather. They uttered seamanly prayers, which are extremely unorthodox, for a bit of sun; and after about a week of knocking about with everything wet, and hardly more sleep than could be got on their feet, between steps, up came the sun, beaming as if glad to see the bark which now had a gentle breeze nuzzling her sail.

The breeze died away; by noon they tossed in a running sea without enough wind on board to stir a feather. During the night the bark was patted about at times by cat's paws, but, though tossing almost as if in a storm, made no way. The next day the sea had flattened into swells; and the sun came up, red as a round cinder, and blazed across the sky as if the cinder had sprung into flame. Even Old Tom, watchful, cursed the sun as it set; there were no clouds to catch the rays and make of them a colored picture, such as warmed his old heart as picture-books warm a child's heart, whisky a man's.

Fore and aft everybody but Heddon was pleased to have some warm, calm weather, though the swells that rocked men staggeringly about were troublesome to comfort. Heddon's one thought was that in a calm Old Bill would surely die. Literally tied down on his bed, he could weather almost any sort of rough blow better than heat and stagnant air. Heddon, who took bearings and read sailing directions, knew that they had been thrust far into that tropic sea-waste, often reported by indignant sailing masters for protracted calms—as if the winds of the world had no right to an idling place. The men forward stopped wet clothes on lines, laid mattresses about the deck, turning them from time to time; they slept their fill but sweat as they slept, and awakened to drink deep of the water they had poured into every cask and container on board the bark. The water was already tasteless. But it was pleasant to loaf about, smoke, yarn, play cards, lose a fortune on a hand, yet have enough left in their imagination of what the treasure would be like to be still rich men. Anyhow, the losers there, no more than heavy losers elsewhere on tick, did not expect to pay; and the sport soon soured in the hot weather.

Awnings were stretched fore and aft. Paint work blistered, pitch crawled, and came away from the ratlines, gumming men's hands and feet; though in the heat of the day when men stepped from out the shade they put on shoes. Drinking water stank, and the swells that had had a fresh sea-blue tint took on a greasy look; and the bark slid up and down the swells as if indeed they were greased, and lifeless canvas slatted from the roll. It was the maddening and unending rhythm of the swells that got in behind the brains of the men. The nights were as hot as day. Stars seemed full of fire, and the scythe of a new moon mowed its way across the heavens. Cockroaches appeared, marching up and down the bulkheads as if looking for cool moist places; and everybody was driven out of hiding, too, and out on deck. Men were too worn and listless to be resentful when kicked again and again into boxhauling to catch flighty breaths that died away, often before the sails filled. In ten days the bark did not make a hundred miles, and most of that was from the set of the current.

"This blastedly blank blank blank ship is Jonered—Jonered!" said the men forward, and grew angered as they said it.

CHAPTER IX

MADAME DOES SOME SCHEMING

THE deck was cluttered with chairs, and the passengers, as Heddon called those who did no work, sat about unsocially, most of them gasping.

Woo Lung, the tireless, remained cheerful, and T'eeay Layeen composed. Young Raeburn loafed at the feet of Po-Shu and teased her.

Old Tom took this idling time to work on the crutches. Heddon, once upon a time, had told him of the sculptor who patted a block of marble, saying, "I see a beautiful angel imprisoned here that I must release!" That trivial anecdote had thrilled Old Tom, and he pestered Heddon to tell more of this Mike Angeler—

"An' was it from doin' angels he got his name? An' was he Irish too?"

All this had been talked out a year or more before; but now as he worked on the crutches, he, being one to talk aloud to himself for lack of another's ears, would mutter savagely:

"Head o' Walscher prisoned at the foot o' one prop, that —— planter's head on t'other. Ol, Bill, he'll be bumpin' of their heads ever' step he takes!"

Everybody else on board the bark was miserable; and Heddon had to say flatly to Old Bill:

"No I won't move you out on deck. It's as hot there as here. And if you move about you'll die—an' have only Heaven's treasure, which does a man no good; for what's the use of having wealth if you can't spend it like a fool? Live soberly, and you might as well be poor! So lie quiet, Bill. We'll rig a punkah and tie a Chinaman to the rope."

And so he did. The Chinese were not tied, but might as well have been, for at a word from T'eeay Layeen one or the other from outside the door kept the air stirring in Old Bill's room.

"D' you know," said Heddon, "I'm beginning to change about in my opinion of Chinks!"

"That," said Raeburn, "that's because the toy-girl prays to a big fat joss you will! She'll get you yet, Skipper. Little Po-Shu says Chinee girl oh so much more nicer than 'Melican *nu-yen!*'"

"So you're learning Chinese, eh? You'll be rubbing coffee on that hide of yours next to get a yellow skin!"

"Yes, oh yes," said Raeburn, making ready to duck and dodge away, "I'm learning the lingo. That's so I can act as interpreter for you—after you're married!"

With that, Raeburn got to his feet and ran, bumping against Vioux's chair as he rounded the deck-house; fleeing, as the guilty do, when none pursue.

Vioux swore irritably and glared after him. He would willingly have choked anybody who, on such a day, had the energy to run and laugh.

II

VIOUX was sick, emaciated and haggard from much drunkenness. His cheeks were bleeding from where he had nicked himself in trying to shave with a razor found in the room. Such was his instinct for dapperness that he would not come out, where everybody could see him, unshaven. His eyes were deeply sunken, his unwaxed mustache hung like the raveled ends of string; and as he weakly let himself down into a chair under the awning he had the feeling that he did not care what happened.

He had hardly seated himself when Madame came near, and spoke pleasantly.

Now his stomach was sickened, his emaciated body venomous with bile. He hated her anyhow with the unpardoning resentment of a man who owes a debt of which he is often reminded; but here on the bark there was no need to pretend a gratitude he had never felt for her getting him out of prison. He was glad enough to have been smuggled out, but she had worried him too much with threats of having him returned.

When she spoke pleasantly, he snarled at her; his lips moved fast, his hands twitched in gestures.

Pelew, whose side Madame had just left, understood no French, but was suspicious. With the slow, swaying walk of a doubtful ape, he came closer, stopped, eyed Vioux, said—

"Lady, is he cussin' you?"

Vioux, spitefully reckless, arose, and with a flicker of old time impudence, bowed, put out his hand, said—

"Monsieur, my mos' sincere appreciation that you so respec' my dear sister!"

"Sister!" said Pelew.

"I have that honor," said Vioux.

"Is this shrimp yer brother?" asked Pelew.

"Lie to him, Lucille," said Vioux in French, "or I tell the truth! I am tired of blows from men you try your stale charms on!"

Madame bit her thin lips, afraid of what Vioux might call the "truth." She said—

"Ze foster brother, yes, Monsieur Pelew."

"Hu-ugh," Pelew commented doubtfully; and evidently thinking that a fellow could properly row a sister if he wanted, stood awkwardly for a moment, then awkwardly withdrew.

"My dear sister," said Vioux, looking after him. "Your taste sinks with your fortune! On that cursed *Dragon* you spread smiles for the devil Heddon—who was at least gentleman enough to understand French. But this clod-head—bah!"

"Beast of a bladder-head," said Madame, "the Pelew is nothing but the handle to my knife!"

"Do not talk of knives!" said Vioux quickly, shuddering. "The cursed Chinamen carry them. I saw poor Zudag!"

"And you did nothing but drink and hide!"

"Do? What could I do? But you, the siren woman—" spitefully—"why have you not smiled upon the Chinese pirate? Made him our friend? Then there would be nothing to fear. This big ape—better the Chinaman!"

Madame's pale face burned, for a moment looked much as if she had put on rouge in a bad light. She did not want to quarrel. She had thought of some use for Vioux, and said:

"Is it for you to insult me so, Julien? Have I not done things you should remember?"

"Like all women, my beautiful Lucille, you think a man unhappy when he is not near you. Bah! Better that prison than this ship! It was at least cool between rock walls, and things were not so bad for one who whispered tales to the guards."

"It is not you, Julien, that speaks, but the brandy bottle!"

"It is I! When one is drunk one sees things clearly. And remembers! It is true that I stole your diamond, but I spent it for your safety. As that devil Heddon was kind enough to send me brandy, I forgive him much!"

"He sent it that you might kill yourself!"

"Why he let Denasso bring it to me I do not care. For that I got it, I remember him kindly, and do not forget how you talked of me when you wanted him to love you. Oh, I am no fool. So saveege, eh? *Magnifique!* Now you say the same to that baboon!"

"How can you be so big a fool as to think I mean more than to use the Pelew for my tool? Ah, Julien, I am now without friends among those whom I have always helped. Abdul has turned coward. Denasso washes dishes in the galley that he may smoke opium. Zudag, murdered! And you, even you, Julien, are no longer my friend."

"How you talk! It was you who said, 'Vioux, away from me!' "

"In anger, Julien, friends do not say what they mean."

"I called you bad names, and there are

things a woman does not forgive. You have said as much!"

"It is not kind, Julien, to remember foolish words."

"But I have no luck. *Mon Dieu*, it is true! I would bring misfortune. 'Away from me, Vioux! You have no luck!' Now what has been done to make you think my luck is better? I am sick."

"You are the gambler, and know that bad luck is like the tide. It goes low, then turns."

"True—if one is lucky. But I am sick and do not care. What good is good luck to a dying man?"

"You, the always brave Julien, are indeed sick to be without hope! If you will help me we will be fortunate once more."

"Let Monsieur the Baboon help you. He is the brave man. So saveege!"

"*Zut!* He is a fool, and fools are the most useful of men."

"Ah, but you look hard at me as you say that!"

"I can not mean you, Julien!"

"But if not me, whom is it that you do mean. Let us be frank. I am a fool and you have need of me. But of what use can I be? I am sick. I am half drunk. By night I shall be dead drunk. There is no other way to sleep."

"Ah, Julien," she asked from behind an intent look, "what would you do if there was nothing to drink, eh?"

"Become mad."

"Just so. And what of Denasso if there should be no opium?" Madame inquired in the way of one who has something dark in mind.

"You tell me, Lucille. I am too sick to think."

"Julien, would he not do whatever that one said who had opium to give him? Has it not always been so?"

"True. But what then? We have none now to give to him. There is nothing that I want Denasso to do."

"That Heddon, Julien, he is our bad luck. I will stop at nothing, and everything is planned. So you see, Julien, how I do trust you to confess so much!"

"Oh no, not at all. I could not betray you. 'Ha, Vioux, you are drunk and a liar!' Men would say that. They would believe you. I do not tell the truth so well as you lie!"

"My poor Julien, do you remember the times we have angrily said things we did not mean. Without you now, I can not do as must be done."

"Very well then. What is to be done?"

"Julien, we are not far from the island where lies the treasure. When the wind comes—"

"It will never come! This is Hell. We are all dead and do not know it. We know only that we are in Hell. But what do you plan, eh?"

"First the Heddon. He is dangerous. We are near the island. There we will get treasure and—" fiercely—"keep it!"

"He is terrible in the fight. Even Abdul—tut tut tut! What can *I* do against one like the Heddon?"

"I soon come to that, Julien. There are others too. There must be none left who can tell tales about us when we return to Paris and have wealth!"

"Paris? Why there if one has wealth?"

"What good, Julien, is wealth if one does not live in Paris? I shall return to Paris."

"That is true, but—"

"If one has wealth and no enemies, the police will learn nothing. So—" she checked off the names on her fingers—"the Heddon first, because he brings bad luck and will rob us. He and the Chinaman have put their heads together. Then Abdul and Denasso."

She stopped. Vioux gazed at her, and nodded.

"You are right, if one is to return to Paris. But to have me out of the way, too, my dear Lucille, would I not be returned to that prison, eh?"

"Julien, you are not so clever as I thought, not to know a woman better than that. Would I take so much trouble to get you out only to put you back?"

"*Peste!* That is an idea. But then, with wealth, as you have said, one could be so much the more happy with no old friends about."

"One wants friends. But is that pig Abdul a friend? Or that smoke-fiend?"

"And Monsieur the Baboon?"

"You are trying to laugh at me! Be careful, Julien. I forgive many things more readily than laughter."

"Well then, I do not laugh. What is to be done?"

"This: We are near the island. The Baboon, as you call the lout, has many times been captain of his own ship and can take us. I have talked to Abdul, but Abdul is a coward and will not risk revenge on the Heddon. Monsieur Baboon says it is very wrong to lift a hand against the captain of one's ship. But if anything should happen to the captain— Pah! What of it, then?"

"The Chinamen!" said Vioux at once.

"They are but four and we are many. T'eeay Layeen would then be our prisoner, and must show us treasure. If the Heddon is out of one's way, all else is easily arranged!"

"You think of everything!" said Vioux, almost admiringly.

"I do," said Madame calmly.

"And this time, Lucille," Vioux asked earnestly, "there *is* treasure, and we can get it?"

"With courage, monsieur. Yes."

"Wealth—in Paris! But it is not for me, Lucille. I am known!"

"With a beard? A big black beard? You would be a Spaniard from South America, one who had grown rich from coffee."

Vioux thoughtfully fingered the tuft on his chin as if to detect how rapidly it might spread and cover his face:

"And to think this day I shaved! Bah! I do nothing right. A beard—wealth—in Paris—with no one to know me! Ah!"

He looked straight at her; Madame looked straight at him, and knew as well of what he was thinking as if he had spoken. She was the one who knew him too well.

"You will help me, Julien?"

"Oh, eagerly, Lucille, as far as a sick man can!"

"We can not have luck until we have a captain who is our friend. And as this friend must sail the ship as we wish after we leave the island with the treasure, this now is the best time to make the change."

"I see. That is right. How you think of everything!"

"I do, Julien. You will help?"

"This Heddon is a big strong man and—"

"Even strong men sleep, and a weak hand may hold a knife, my Julien."

"*Mon Dieu*, Lucille!" said Vioux with a start. "You do not mean I must do the thing?"

She regarded him with a faint smile, then shrugging her shoulders:

"Why not, my brave Julien? A knife in the dark—pah! So easy!"

"Ugh. To feel about in a big body for so small a thing as a heart! To strike and miss! I do not forget what I saw when I looked upon Zudag's body!"

"Then think, Julien, how else? Is there no other way?"

She urged him in the tone of one who has a plan, and will feel encouraged if another, too, thinks of it and calls it excellent—

"Some way that is easy?"

"A gun is easier, if one does not miss. But a gun, no! It makes the noise that would bring everybody on top of me. *Mon Dieu*, Lucille! I see now how wise you were in the old days never to think of murder. It is not so easy. I begin to see that it means something to kill and not be caught!"

"There is one way that is safe, Julien. And sure!"

"Then tell me of that. If it is true, Lucille, I will show you at once that I am a man to be depended on."

"What do you say, Julien, to making another do for you what you tell him?"

"Do murder, Lucille!"

"Murder, Julien!"

"How terrible you have become! Your lips do not tremble as you speak the word. But ah, you will coax the Baboon?"

"No. He will know nothing. Through some sailor-superstition, he says he must not lift his hand against the captain. He says it would bring bad luck."

"Then who, if not he—or Abdul?"

"Neither," said Madame. She paused, lowered her voice: "Denasso."

"That fellow? Dare so much? Not he, Lucille!"

"Listen, Julien. In the galley there is a can on a shelf—so big. By that can there is a pipe—so long. Denasso helps in the kitchen that he may smoke. I can not go up near the galley without stupid men looking hard at me, and staring to see why I am there and what I do. I have walked that way many times, but always they watch. Now you are a man and will pass unnoticed. Look for the time when no one is in the galley and other men are busy. Bring the opium and pipe to me. Within three days Denasso will do as I tell him."

"You have become another woman, Lucille! This is terrible! But I too no longer care what I do. You shall see. I am a man to be depended on!"

Then again Vioux felt of the black tuft on his chin, fingered it, seemed trying to spread it out into a beard; and the cast-eyed slant of his gaze lingered on her face. Madame even smiled a little, so well did she know of what he was thinking: In Paris, with wealth, and none to know that he was Julien Vioux, escaped convict.

THE calm did not break, would not break; men who had sailed around the world grew queasy on the ship that lay as if at anchor, throbbing to the toss of mile-deep swells. The surface of the ocean was like molten glass, melted by the sun; the deck like a great griddle on which all were being roasted for their sins. At times through the day riffles ran over the sea, but these died away before they came on board, as if the ship, accursed, was never again to feel God's breath.

"Jonered, by ——!" said men, gasping, angered, uneasy.

Some had pressed their noses against the port glass of Madame's room and stared within at the great serpent which seemed ever to lie with eyes fixed on them, at times to lift its head watchfully, as if listening.

They talked among themselves, wondering how to rid the ship of the thing. No wind would come with it on board. Pelew said that the lady, meaning Madame, had said she could not get the python to return to its box; it was wise (she said) and knew men hated it; knew, too, they hoped to throw it and the box overboard.

"Lady, them fellers are goin' crazy," said Pelew, who as much as any man hated the snake but he had the feeling that Madame was a woman a man should help any way that he could.

Madame shrugged her shoulders and spread her hands in an expressive gesture of helplessness.

The men forward brooded gloomily, got panicky at talk of cholera, were sickened by the heat and stale water. They threw food overboard with a feeling of spiting somebody, since they could not eat; and Woo Lung, as if he knew nothing of calm, or queasy stomachs, cooked the same amount every day and much the same kind of mess.

"It's whisky we want!" they begged.

Though even the stock that Walscher had had stored on board was beginning to run low. Heddon poured enough from time to time into the scuttle butt to flavor the putrid water. Though he felt and said it served 'em right, he got no pleasure out of seeing the men suffer.

But of all who suffered, Denasso was tortured most, for now the opium and pipe were gone, and for him the very breath of life must be smoke-flavored. He begged the men with pathetic mildness to tell him who had hid the pipe, and suspected Pelew; but Pelew, with a staring look that suggested honesty, said:

"What the —— would I want with your —— old suck-stick! I never touched it. Wouldn't touch it. Smoke yourself to death for all I care. Get to —— away from me. You stink o' the stuff now."

Woo Lung, being a wise man, had never given himself sufficiently to the habit to be tortured by not smoking.

"Hab got tim be lazee, now—then smokum littee. No-hab tim, all litee. Wun tim moon-pidgen, maskee!"

If he had the time to be lazy, he might smoke a little; if not, all right; if only once a month, that was all right too.

But Denasso was eaten through and through with downright pain. He dragged himself about the deck, searching, unable to remain quiet, hoping that whoever had played the trick would see how he suffered and be merciful. He suspected, now this person, now that. Heddon felt sorry for the poor devil, but T'eeay Layeen regarded him with a pitiless gaze.

III

EVENING was coming on; the sun, red as a red-hot plate, was slipping down behind the ocean; and such was the heat of the hour, the redness of the sun, that an imaginative fellow might listen for the sizzle as the fire-ball seemed to move down into the water.

Denasso, who knew now by whom he was being tortured, but not yet why, came once more to Madame who sat apart on the deck, her lips close-pressed into a line of smiling cruelty; she waited with serpent-like patience for him to be tortured utterly into submission. She knew the signs, and now was the time.

He, usually so indolently listless, now seemed almost to writhe even in standing; his yellow face was sunken, his eyelids twitched; he scratched and rubbed himself, with one hand or the other, always rubbing at the back of his neck.

"Madame! Madame, for God's sake let me have it! It's like breath—breath to me! I've told you I'll do anything, anything! Whatever you want—anything!"

"Zut! Anything means nothing. And why is it you make of yourself such a pest? It is overboard, the filthy pipe. I have told you so. I threw it there to remind you it is not safe to forget such a good friend as I. Take yourself off!"

"This has happened before, and you lied then the same way. There is something you drive me to do. I'll do it! Oh I'll do anything! But quick, or I'll be useless—have no strength—be dead! You see—"

He held out his trembling hands for her to see how badly shaken and weak he had become.

"Ho, if it is that you so want to please me—ah then, let me think. That Po-Shu is a wicked girl. She told lies on Lianfo. Because of her we have suffered much. One must not escape so easily. And so to please me, what would you do, eh? Kill her?"

Denasso, quite as if tottering, stepped back, blindly shook his head, face down, rubbing his face with writhing fingers:

"No, no, no—not that! You don't mean that! Anything else, not that—I won't! I'll die, but not that—I won't!"

"How you talk! It is like a man! 'Oh Madame, I would do *anything* for you!' Then I say what pleases me, and you make the sick groan, and say, 'Oh not that!' "

"But she is a woman and I—"

"Oh I see. You are not yet long enough without opium to hurt a woman. But a man, eh? Let me think. That rat of a Raeburn, I do not like him."

Denasso looked at her with much the expression of a man who is being crucified; he was thin as a skeleton, and so much did he tremble that his bones seemed quivering as the bones of an articulated skeleton do when shaken.

"No, Madame, you devil, no! I will die, but he has been my friend!"

"Oh so, eh?" said Madame coldly. "Then go away from me and come again only when you have more need than now of what I can give you!"

"But this, this murder!" He gasped, swallowed hard. "You would never think of murder, but now—oh, —— you!"

"This is not Paris. And here one must do what one can when one has enemies—ah, and friends like you that will help!"

"So I, I have come to this," said Denasso. "It was for fun, a boy's curiosity—I went with friends to an opium den. I, that had the promise of music in me and was praised by masters! But that night in the haze of smoke I saw all my dreams come true, all without having to go through the years of work that make a musician great. Ah, I was cursed! My friends who smoked that night were sickened, but I, I had the dreams. I, miserable fool, chose to smoke instead of sweat and win to dreams. A wasted life! Now I even talk of killing friends to get a bit—"

"*Peste!*" said Madame. "I too was young, but what is done is best forgotten. Po-Shu, she is a woman. Well, so am I, so that is something I pardon. The time will come soon when I shall give attention to her myself. The rat Raeburn is a friend. Very well then. We must not harm friends."

Then, leaning forward with a hard stare, she asked quickly:

"But that Heddon, who despises you, eh? What of him?"

"For just one pipe, first?" Denasso begged.

"No."

"A half pea?"

"No."

"One little whiff, Madame? Oh, just one!"

"No."

"But how can I? You see, I am weak. I can hardly stand and—"

"Nothing first. Ah, I know you. You have coaxed the smoke from me before. It will be easy. He sleeps like a drunk man."

"My throat is on fire. Pain runs through me like lightning. I have not slept for two nights. Let me have merely the pipe—I will scrape the bowl and—"

"No. I let you have nothing!"

She said it firmly, and looking him up and down began to suspect that opium smokers do not make good murderers. When pain-ridden they have no resolution; when full of hop they are blandly at peace with the world.

Then Madame inquired with the air of a woman who would talk no more—

"You will do it?"

"Do it? Do it? Madame, if so, then what will become of you, of us, of the ship? We would be lost here at sea without him. Not know where to go. Or how."

"Oh," said Madame with assurance, "you find more excuses! I do not become frightened easily. There are others who know how to make a ship go where one wants."

Denasso, rubbing and rolling his neck, said:

"Yes, there are others—but none on this ship, Madame."

"How you talk! There is the man Pelew. What of him, eh?"

"Pelew can not read nor write," said Denasso, wholly unaware of how important this sounded to Madame.

"Eh? What is that you say!"

"Why, he can not read nor write. How navigate a ship?"

"What you say, it is true?" she demanded.

"Every one knows it. If anything should happen to Captain Heddon, the ship would be at sea without any one to know where it was going."

Madame leaned forward, elbow on the arm of her chair and with closed fist rapidly patted her tightly pressed lips; at the same time her toe beat a tattoo on the deck, and she frowned thoughtfully into the dusk: So that was why the Baboon had said it would be bad luck to lift a hand against the captain, eh? And but for this opium-wretch's chance remark—

It seemed that nothing she ever planned would go right! Even the cleverest and most audacious thing she had ever done was a mistake! Vioux had lost in prison that impudent flair which, in the old days, had been so much like courage that it was a satisfactory substitute. How she had planned and schemed! Worst of all, spent money, too. All to get him out, only to wish that he was back in prison. But, for all the threatening that she did, it was not so easy to put him there again without getting attention called to herself as the one who had got him out. And that would be bad.

And on this sea-trip, how unluckily she had begun by trusting the brute Grogan! Then she had tried to face about quick-wittedly and captivate Heddon. At last, desperately, she ventured to try what she could do with Pelew. He, the clod-head, to seem the better in her eyes had lied! Bad as things were, she saw now that they would have been worse had her plan been carried far enough to put him in charge of the ship. Ah, much was plain now! That Chinaman had known Heddon's value and watched over him!

Madame felt frustrated and was enraged. So intent was her angered brooding that Denasso's voice fell for a time on her ears without being noticed; then she heard:

"—it is worth nothing to any one that I continue to live, least of all to myself. My hands are colored with opium but I will not have them stained with blood. Captain Heddon despises me, but I despise myself too, so I can not hate him for that. You are a devil, and may the good God torture you as—"

"I but jested, you fool!" said Madame angrily. "I do not have people killed. You know that. But I had to make you remember that I, Madame Lucille, and not that old cook of a Chinese, am your friend. On this ship you had forgotten me."

"Oh Madame, forgive me the way I talked! But I suffer! Please, you will let me have the pipe, now? I will never forget again! Anything you want, Madame—anything! I will do it. Anything! Now you will let me have—"

Madame arose from her chair and caught hold of him with a movement like a bound, and in a low fierce voice said:

"Now this is truth! Now I tell you. To-night you kill that Pelew! He is the one! Nobody will care. We must be rid of him. He is the pest that will not let me make a friend of the Captain Heddon. And I will do that somehow. It must be! And to-night you do it. No one will know, if you are quick and strike in the back! When you have done that, come to me and you may smoke all you like. Till then—no! No! You hear me? No!"

He struggled weakly, backing from her, but she held him, shook him, bent nearer, saying:

"Speak! Speak to me!"

His face twitched uncontrollably as he stared. He had often believed that she was not quite sane, and now was more frightened by her than by what she demanded.

Though his body, quite as much as if tied to the stake, was in the midst of a flame-like pain, for the moment he forgot the pain, the opium-hunger, everything, except that the hand of a mad woman was upon him; and, confusedly, he begged to be turned loose.

Madame took away her hand and pushed at him, though the push was like a blow; then, rapidly:

"Go away! Go from me! You are a fool and a coward! Pah! Miserable smoke-fiend! And if you say one word to anybody of me, the pipe, the can, everything—into the sea it goes! When you have done what I tell you, then come to me! But not till then! Now go 'way—away! Pah!"

Denasso, walking unsteadily, much as if he had become suddenly blind, went off, turning this way and that; then being amidships he sat down on a hatch and put his head between his hands.

IV

THAT night young Raeburn, who slept on top of the deck-house where it was coolest, had a dream, or at least he thought it a dream.

Bad dreams were nothing new these nights; and as best he could he fended them off by trying to be drunk when he went to sleep; but this was not easy as it took more and more liquor to make him woozy, and liquor was more and more hard to come by. But being an unscrupulous rascal, he had snooped about until he discovered where Old Tom had stored a bottle against the hour of need. He took the bottle, then generously shared it with Old Tom and Abdul, saying he had stolen it from Vioux. Tom complimented him on being a proper lad; and even the surly Abdul who did not care much for whisky, after a drink or two, patted the youngster's back, nearly knocking the breath from him.

Raeburn, as his share, took care to get a good sleeping potion; then he climbed to the deck-house, lay face up on his pallet, winked at the stars, and, with some effort, did not sing. Such times as he had broken into song, Heddon came to inquire unfriendlily why he couldn't die without making so much of a fuss about it? Saying, too:

"Old Bill has enought to put up with without being troubled by your —— drunken yowling. Shut up."

Raeburn, of course, couldn't afterward remember just when he had dozed off; but somewhere in the twilight of drunken sleep he seemed to be awakened by a hand that shook him; saw, or dreamed that he saw, a frightfully haggard face in the starlight that in a vague unreal way seemed to be Denasso's; and a voice not at all like Denasso's, which was usually so gentle and lazy, spoke huskily, with anguish, as if even dream-specters at times suffered pain.

The next morning when Raeburn awakened only the merest traces of the dream confusedly remained; and these only because it had been a most distressing sort of nightmare in which he seemed to have seen Madame not as a woman at all, but as a bald hideous monster, whose teeth were all knives, and with those frightful protruding teeth she snapped at men in the dark. The spectral Denasso had seemed trying to warn Raeburn to look out for her; had urged him to warn Heddon and Pelew to watch out for her. The specter had said it could not appear to them, that it could appear only to a friend; and in vanishing it seemed to have said something about not re-appearing again, ever.

Raeburn's head ached a bit; his mouth seemed lined with dry cotton, and he had the rueful feeling that he had better go to bed sober if, drunkenly, he was to have such nightmares.

He sat up, rubbing his head and eyes, trying to think. From the forecastle he could hear coughing and grumbling voices, as if men who had slept badly were reluctant to awaken from even bad sleep to daylight that was worse than any nightmare. Abdul, who bedded himself on the main hatch, was still asleep. His rumbling snores could be heard. Abdul could snore as he pleased, in peace. No one dared awaken him. Formerly chunks of the galley stove's coal were thrown at him through the dark; but never after the time when, thus disturbed, Abdul took an ax from its rack, went to the forecastle, rousted everybody out, and said that if the men didn't leave him alone he would "chust chob off eveypody's —— headt in two!"

Raeburn now could also hear a far-off tinkling rattle and clatter in the galley. Woo Lung did not seem to mind heat or work, but from before daylight until long after dark, puttered busily, often humming, always answering cheerfully, with a sort of lilting sing-sing, the curses of men whose stomachs were soured:

"Belly catchee up-side-down feelee? Ho you see! Plenty fline bleakfast. Can do. Olo Woo Lung catchee fline chow-chow. Way-lo! Come 'gain—you see!"

As Raeburn got down on deck he saw some of the forecastle men bunched together at the rail, some half dressed, all unwashed, with hair touseled. A man held the bucket and line with which, every morning, salt water was dipped up and thrown on their chests and backs to freshen them; but now they stood talking and staring down at the water.

"What's wrong?" Raeburn asked on his way to the scuttle butt.

"Man overboard."

"Man over—" Raeburn pushed among them, glanced at the unbroken water, then: "Where? Who?"

"P'lew seen 'im, las' night. He jus' tol' us. That hop-head jumped."

"Denasso!"

"Denasso, yeah. P'lew had the middle watch—watchin' for a wind. No wind with that snake a-board!"—other men quickly mumbled that it was so— "P'lew he jus' now come for'ard off watch an' tol' us. Tol' us las' night he seen a feller climb down off the deck-house aft there. He thought it was *you* up to somepin. Right here the feller he climbs up. P'lew, you know ol' P'lew, stopped 'im. 'What you up to?' says P'lew. 'I'm goin' jump overboard,' says the feller. Then P'lew saw who it was, an' he says—you know ol' P'lew! He says, 'All right. I guess it's best thing you can do.' So the feller climbed up—right here. P'lew said—an' he jumped. P'lew he'd took up a line ready to throw it, but the feller didn't make a sound. P'lew he peered over an' could see a black spot come up an' go down, but the feller wasn't strugglin', so ol' P'lew he coiled up the line agin. He tol' us about it jus' now."

The men again stared down at the water, silently. The ship had drifted and turned through the night; this wasn't at all the spot where the man had drowned himself, but it was from this place he had jumped and gone down without lifting a cry for help—here or hereafter. What a way to die!

Then the man with the bucket threw it overboard and began hauling in the line to souse his mates with lukewarm water sticky with salt.

When Raeburn came up, Pelew stood in the forecastle doorway, prodding a pipe-stem with a straw.

"I broke off a straw," he said, only he called it a blank-blank-blank-blankety-blanked straw, and sucked and puffed at the clogged stem. Then, interestedly, "Say, I thought it was you, las' night an'—"

"But why'd you let him!"

"Let 'im? Why 'f he wanted to, what'd I care? The ship was still an' the water like glass, so I jus' thought I'd see if he'd do it. In this —— blasted world if a feller can't do with his own —— body what he wants, there ain't nothin' he's got a right to! Rotten blasted hop-head! But if I'd ha' known he had that much guts I'd ha' liked him."

Pelew sucked and puffed and spit, then with a curse broke the stem from the pipe and slammed the pieces to the deck. He held out his hand, demandingly:

"Give me your pipe. I've got to have a smoke! Now don't stan' there lookin' like you was seein' things in your sleep—give me that pipe!"

The only tears that fell for the unhappy Denasso dropped from the eyes of the little Chink girl. All of her life she had been watched over, treated as a thing of rare porcelain, given rich clothes, sweet food that her flesh might be the better to look at; soft beds where she might snuggle like a pearl on silk; and Denasso had given her nothing but kind words, seeming the more kind perhaps because given furtively lest Madame overhear.

Yet Po-Shu wept for him as if she had lost an elder brother. T'eeay Layeen looked at her in silence.

Woo Lung, who knew more of wisdom than was contained in even the wise books of the East, said:

"He muchee fline boy—*galow!* Too bad die-lo. Slomebody belongey bad heart stealum *yen tsiang*. Fline bloy. Too bad. No blobbery—all finishee one-tim jump. Maybe hab got fline tim now. Maskee!"

Thus the old scholar who had fallen low cheerily paid his repect to the unlucky boy from whom somebody with a bad heart had stolen the pipe; but, said Woo Lung, being a fine boy he had made no fuss, and with one jump had put his troubles to an end. Maybe he was better off than ever now. And what of it, anyhow? Maskee!

CHAPTER X

THE TOY GIRL

HEDDON was up and about the deck all night looking for wind, and pausing now and then as he passed by chairs and pallets where people struggled for air in their dozing; and he glowered into their faces, hating them; this night hating himself. He couldn't have slept had he tried. Being in one of his black moods, he had got out a bottle of brandy, drank half of it, then threw the half-full bottle overboard by way of showing contempt for stuff that made his thoughts grow blacker.

When such dark moods as this came upon him, fight them as he would, still he must remember his youth, his home, the proud name of his family, the hope they had put upon him, and all the good things in the way of worldly honor and manly worth that he had forsaken. It hurt at such times to look himself in the face and see that he was a wastrel; and he cursed himself bitterly for the fool he was and would always be.

This night as he paced the deck, leaned moodily from the taffrail, or sat with great loneliness in shadows on the big chest by the galley, the Devil kept near his side and whispered of evil things it would be worth while to do for the chance of treasure: Pelew was dangerous, but could be readily forced into a quarrel; the pirate Chinese would, without doubt, somehow try to keep the earrings and such taken from the heads of men he had killed—but trussed up like a prisoner and knocked about a bit if need be, he would be helpless—and generous? With both pockets full of gold one could return home and be pardoned the past; for much is forgiven the prodigal son who comes home leading his own fatted calf.

Heddon listened long and with wavering temptation to these dark whispers that arose among his thoughts; then he said suddenly, aloud, with savage finality—

"Oh go to ——!"

II

T'EEAY LAYEEN ate in the deckhouse cabin, alone. He was there in sight of anybody who cared to pass through or look in; he ate with chop-sticks, slowly, meditatively, and was served by Woo Lung, who, like all busy persons, had time for everything. Though the meals were frugal, T'eeay Layeen sat at the table with a lingering air of leisure, and apparently would not have troubled himself for something better, even if it could have been had for the wishing.

Heddon came in.

T'eeay Layeen offered a cup of tea by way of showing that he was friendly. Heddon sat down, reached out with both hands for the cup, and waited while T'eeay Layeen, being gracious, talked of many things, one of them having to do with the ship, before he raised his cup. Then Heddon noisily gulped down his tea. The Chinaman gazed at him for a moment, then inquired if there was something that Heddon wished to bring to his unworthy attention.

Heddon twisted about in his chair and looked to see if they were alone; the doors that opened into the cabin were open, and any one within the rooms could hear; but it was breathlessly still and hot, and people sat about on deck, trying to doze and gasping as if in a stupor.

Heddon asked—

"How much faith have you got in the word of a foreign devil?"

T'eeay Layeen looked at him inscrutably, then answered—

"None."

"In that case," said Heddon, "I can lie without deceiving you."

The Chinaman seemed to smile appreciatively, and bowed slightly but without lowering his eyes.

"It just occurred to me about ten minutes ago," said Heddon, eying him intently, "that this island you're taking us to—if ever again we get a touch of wind—is likely not to be uninhabited. How about it?"

"No one," said T'eeay Layeen, very slowly, "is there. You ask it, why?"

"Well sir, I'll tell you. And you can think it lie or truth, just as you feel about it. But I'd a —— sight rather there were a thousand or so of your pirates on the island than not!"

T'eeay Layeen expressively, but without speaking, inquired why; this with the merest movement of his eyelids, and he watched as if watching not for Heddon's words, but for the hidden impulses that put forth the words.

"You want to know? Well, this is where you will think I'm lying. If you had the men there to say to us, 'Take this and leave that. Do this and not that' we'd all be very quiet and humble for fear of losing our heads. But if this ship-load of fools, of which I have the doubtful honor to be captain, hits a treasure-beach, with half of us hating the other half, and nobody trusting anybody, and each after as much as he can grab—there's no doubt about it, all —— will pop. Right now that crew up there would follow me; but on shore they'll go about and follow the fellow that promises 'em the most gold. That's where you are going to get into trouble."

T'eeay Layeen again silently expressed interest, and waited.

"You've got some treasure on this island, have you?"

"For more years than are in five hundred," said T'eeay Layeen slowly, "this island has been the secret of men who served the Sea Dragon. There was stored and forgotten the jewels and gold taken from the treasure ships, in long ago time, of the emperor. Many searched for the secret hiding place of this wealth. I alone found it. The daughter of an emperor, her beautiful self, was one time hostage there. The cloud of ships sent by the emperor could not find her. For her, at last, he gave as ransom many jewels and a casket large enough to serve as her couch, filled with dust of the purest gold. It is there!"

"It is there, you say? You found it?"

"It is there. All I have said, and more, much more. The secret was lost. It was I who found the treasure store."

"And with all that to hand," said Heddon, who had doubts, "you still go batting about the sea, getting wrecked and having the risk of neck and head being parted? What's the good of being a pirate if you don't want what you get? Why haven't you drawn off to some part of the world and become a rich man? Or bought a pardon and become a prince?"

"Go where I would, enemies would follow. Every shadow would hide a knife, every cup, poison. There can be no peace but war for one who has the enemies that are mine. The falcon is kept sleepless that it may be fierce. For more years than are in twenty, I have not slept. I am a Chinese. The Manchus who rule China would have sold me a pardon only that they might get me to come within reach of their hands, kill me, and confiscate all that was left after I bought of them the pardon. When I am so unwise as to trust those I know are faithless, may I perish like a fool."

"Well, I'd say," Heddon told him with a hard look and in a harsh voice, "I'd say you're an impenetrable liar, or else pretty much of a fool!"

Heddon scowled with a puzzled and half-angered frown straight into the narrowed slant eyes that regarded him with calm severity. T'eeay Layeen, though as if unused to being so addressed, yet retained that mask-like composure, hiding whatever he felt. Then he said very quietly—

"I ask what you mean?"

"Mean? You don't mean to hand over anything like that treasure-store to the scoundrels on this ship. I'm their leader. Yet you say all that wealth is there. Don't you know —— well we're likely to put a rope about your neck, a gun to the back of your head, and say, 'Lead on!'"

The face of the Chinese remained inscrutably calm. One wrist rested on the table, the other hand delicately touched the side of a cup, and he sat perfectly still for many seconds, then:

"It is written that the tongue of each man is a traitor who, unguarded, flies straight into the ears of his enemy. But if I give enough to keep the promise that I would give treasure?"

"Don't you know a man's pocket is a queer kind of belly—feels empty as long as there's more to be had for the taking?"

"You will say to them—" with a slight movement he indicated others of the ship's company—"what I have foolishly told you?"

"They'll guess it without being told. Fore an' aft, the talk all along has been that you of course won't willingly give up all you have. But torture makes a man talk. You're in for it!"

The Chinaman nodded gravely, then—

"But you I believe to be an honest man."

"What the —— do you know about honesty?"

"You maybe are a Christian and be honest? You maybe believe in Hell and God? That makes you afraid, maybe?"

"Some of the belief I've got, yes. But not enough of the fear to do me much good. You're right, I do believe in God, in Hell, in devils—yellow devils!"

"And you," T'eeay Layeen inquired with a faint mild hint of protest, "would torture me, put little bamboo splinters into my flesh, break the bones in one finger then another, to make it so that I would show more treasure?"

"Not me, no. I wouldn't do it. But I might walk off where I couldn't hear you yell, and wait, while the others did it!"

"You think I would talk, eh?"

"You would, yes. Of course you would!"

"And you—" T'eeay Layeen asked—"would help do that?"

"You just said two minutes ago you had no faith in the word of a foreign devil. And the way you put the question, of course now I'll say— No. But by —— it is the truth! Take my share of what the others get out of you— I'll do that quick enough. But tie a man up and poke splinters into him! No, not even a Chinaman I had a grudge against! And you, there're things about you I like!"

"You funny Christian man to believe your God cares what you do to a Chinaman to get gold. Have not your Christian God's men made war on my people to make them use opium, which is great torture? To make poor people give up money for opium, you Christian men brought gun-ships, destroyed the graves of my ancestors, made even my own father go to his death because he would not tell his people to use the black smoke, and not to fight good Christian men who wanted nothing but to make poor Chinamen so sick with poppy cramps that they would take rice money from their families to buy more of what Christian men sell. I had pleasure to watch your friend be sick and groan because his opium was gone, and there was no Christian merchantman to sell him more. May the curse of it go far among your people who put war upon my people when our emperor said, 'No more opium!' So you—" T'eeay Layeen's voice was as even and calm as if he read from an ancient book—"so you are not like a Christian man if you care what you do to a Chinaman when a little torture would make him give up treasure!"

"Your father was killed in—"

"Murdered. What you call—" this slowly —"ex-e-cut-ed. That means murdered in a public place because he has not enough friends to help."

"And you turned pirate then?"

"I turned Christian then."

"Christian?"

"I went to missionaries, read in the Bible and so learned to speak like a foreign devil. I was young, but my father's only son. If I failed, there would be none to avenge him. I was a good Christian boy, and in three years I became a servant in the house of the Admiral-Governor who killed my father. Him I killed, too, in his bed, in darkness, but the spirits of all my ancestors were there beside me, so it was not murder—it was ex-e-cu-tion!"

Heddon frowned thoughtfully, then:

"If I was a Chinaman and any —— good, I'd feel the way you do, I suppose, about white devils, opium and all. But you can't blame a race for what one man does, or one set of men. You've read the Bible, you say. Then you know that Christ was a Jew and so was Judas. Which only means there's the best and worst in every race. There's a low mess of whites on this ship, and I'm one of 'em. We're all after treasure. You've got me stirred up now with talk about an old pirate cache. And it hasn't been so long ago since I didn't want to hear the word 'treasure' again, ever! But man's a fool, and however he tries to hide it, there's always a glint of gold or some woman's whisper! And if there is to be gold, I'll want my share!"

Heddon said it with a kind of jeering sincerity, as if he did not want to be a brute, but recognized the flaw of human weakness that was in him.

"And the woman?" T'eeay Layeen inquired inscrutably.

"What woman?"

"Po-Shu."

"What the —— have I to do with her?"

"She," said T'eeay Layeen, with a faint tempting note in his voice, "she wants to be the slave to you."

"You—" said Heddon without anger, just by way of clearing the air of Po-Shu—"you are a liar. No, you can't tempt me to take a toy-girl for my share of pirate gold!"

T'eeay Layeen answered calmly—

"You have her heart, and her heart is a great treasure."

"If she had two hearts it would be all the same. She looks the Chink girl, yet on Lianfo there was some talk that she was half white?"

"Po-Shu is not soiled by one drop of foreign devil blood. She was born in the shadows behind the Dragon Throne."

"Royal-blooded, you mean? Don't believe it!"

T'eeay Layeen hesitated; to Heddon it

seemed that he paused in choosing what kind of lie to tell; then he said:

"No. Her mother was, as you call it, a toy-woman. The man she loved would not heed a mere woman's words when she prayed against his enemies. She knew one time there was poison in his wine cup, and that he might be saved and warned, she rushed from the women's quarters while he sat at dinner with friends who were enemies. She snatched the cup from his uplifted hand. For such rude manners there was only death. She drank the wine that was on the way to his lips, and died. He was a powerful man in the land and so killed many enemies that her spirit might be made happy and his own life more secure. But whom the Manchus hate must die before his time, so the father of Po-Shu died. The mother's name was Po-Shu, which is to say, great treasure. The girl-child of such a woman must too have a great treasure-heart. Do you not think so?"

"That's her tale," said Heddon. "I guess a Chink girl can lie as well as a white—little better from what you've just said. Has more imagination. If all that's true, where'd she learn her English? And how get to Sydney? And into the hands of that snake charmer?"

T'eeay Layeen nodded gravely; however he may have been irritated by the rudeness of this big barbarian who showed scant courtesy, but something very like bold honesty, the Chinaman's composure did not for a moment flicker.

"In China," he said slowly, "some China government men make it that some little girls be taught to sing, to dance, to play music, to speak English. Foreign-devil officials, though good Christian men, like pretty Chinese girls, and put them into pretty houses where nobody can see, visit them often and talk. The girl listens and if a clever girl, coaxes. What the foreign-devil official tells her, she tells to the China government man. Po-Shu was to be such a one. But a China government man thought it better to have her for himself. As he was an evil man who kept the tax money, the gods who rule over the punishment of men gave his junk to me. All the gold he could get his friends to send for the ransom was no more than enough to buy his own head from under the sword. So I kept the girl Po-Shu.

"In the foreign devil city of Sydney, among the gifts I made to the half-white Chinaman who there was my comprador, was the treasure-hearted Po-Shu, for though half-white the comprador was not dishonest. White devil men who serve the law broke into his house at night to find the Chinese girl they had heard was there, and in running to hide as she was told, Po-Shu opened the wrong door and went out into the darkness. She was frightened. She turned this way, that way, and was lost.

"A man and a woman saw her in the shadows by the side of the street. The woman said, 'Come with us, and we will take you to your friends.' It was that woman who has the snake. Po-Shu was frightened when she saw they were not to be friends. To make them afraid to keep her, Po-Shu told them the comprador was an English agent who had brought her from China as a gift to a prince in India. The child had heard of India, but did not know it was far off. She said that great search would be made. That they must take her back to the comprador. Instead they made her body black like a negro's body and took her with them from one ship to another."

"You know," said Heddon, thoughtfully piecing together with this story what he recalled that Madame had told him of Po-Shu, "I almost believe that tale."

"A woman's heart is like the little needle. One may point it this way, that way, and it stays as you point it until it comes near the lodestone. Then it turns. You may hold it as you wish, but you can not keep from it the desire to go to the lodestone. If there is one who can explain this, that one maybe can explain why Po-Shu has the desire to be your slave. She does not know why. She feels only the desire. As her mother drank of the snatched wine cup, so would she die for you. The woman who has the treasure-heart has no desire to live longer than she can serve her lord. She has asked," said the imperturbable Chinaman, "if I am willing you can buy her from me."

"Buy her!" said Heddon explosively. "What for? What with? What would I do with her? I don't want her. Haven't said ten words to her. If this sort of thing's going on behind my back, I won't even look at her again. ——! what would I do with her even if I wanted her? And I don't!"

"And I have told her," said T'eeay Layeen, just as if he had not listened to Heddon's protest, "that the one moment we enter the harbor of the Hidden Port that she is yours to own, to sell, to keep, to kill. That is why, though there were still tears in her eyes for the friend who died of desire for the black smoke, you have heard her be happy and laugh."

"Haven't noticed," said Heddon. "Don't intend to notice. I don't want her. That goes!"

"Among my captains there was one Tsing Ku—" T'eeay Layeen repeated the name, shading his tone as if there were something about the sound of the name, or about the man who owned it, that was not pleasing—"Tsing Ku, who offered to me twice the sum of his share in her master's ransom for Po-Shu. It was not because she shrank with dislike of him that I refused. It was because I would not give a treasure-hearted woman to one I have watched long and carefully for fear he would be treacherous. But to you, I give her."

Heddon glowered at him, perplexed, mystified, a little resentfully feeling that this Chinaman was somehow subtly getting him entangled into a kind of allegiance. The compliment of even the unwanted gift had influence, though consciously resisted. Heddon knew, or at least believed, that all Chinamen are liars, good ones. He felt that the wily T'eeay Layeen was trying to haul him over to his own defense, cause him to help the Chinaman save his own treasure-store, or at least keep him from being mistreated, abused, tortured.

"You know," said Heddon, exasperated, yet with something of a laugh, "you're likely to be —— badly fooled. A Chinaman can be a gentleman on his way to Hell, but a white man can't. I don't want the girl—I more than don't want her. I won't have her! But I'll say this: If ever we do get to that island of yours, and you break out a good big handful of gold with some jewels mixed up in it for each man of us, I'll say you've kept your promise, and nobody'll lay hand on you without getting hurt. That was our bargain, and we'll stick to it. But," said Heddon thrusting out his palm with the fingers claw-like, "just look at the size of that hand!" He laughed with a kind of bitter good-nature and T'eeay Layeen smiled.

Heddon went from the cabin. T'eeay Layeen looked after him with inscrutable attentiveness. Surely a barbarian, an odd and dangerous barbarian; strangely honest, who could not be tempted into lying about even his dishonesty. T'eeay Layeen had a weakness toward brave, rashly-spoken men. He had no fear at all of what might happen to himself when they reached the island of the Hidden Port; for on this island was a village, his own, housing a hundred families even when the junks were at sea; and every man of them would cut the throat of a priest at a nod from T'eeay Layeen.

CHAPTER XI

BAAL-PHELGOR THE SNAKE

THE crew, worn out by the heat, with sour stomachs gnawing at their bowels, at last talked themselves into a sort of futile anger, and, much like a bunch of lank scarecrows marching off from where they had been stuck, came aft to Heddon, in a body. They were not much of a body; five frayed, sickly men, one with a broken shoulder; all with a strained, hollow look about the eyes, as if they were not well fed, and with a shuffling uneasiness in their feet. They were afraid of Heddon, but hopeful.

Pelew hung off and listened. It irritated him—the trouble-maker—that he was unwillingly in sympathy with their demand. He liked Madame, though for two or three days now Madame had regarded him with an aloofness that he understood hardly better than the French phrases she rattled at him when he wanted to know what was the matter, and did she feel sick or somepin? He had no idea of what it was all about. He knew only that women were queer. Any dance girl on any drunken night ashore would teach a fellow that, and after many nights in the waterfront joints of ports scattered about the world, one began to perceive that queerness was characteristic of ladies.

This queerness had begun on the day when she gave him a piece of printed paper, asked him to read it, and said that though she spoke English she could not read.

"I'm like you," said Pelew. "Speak it fine, but readin' bothers me."

As the men came aft, Old Tom was sitting on the deck, with a litter of tiny chips about him, trying laboriously to cut out a knob on the otherwise finished crutch that would resemble Walscher's head. He stood up, absently scratched at his head with the point of the knife, looked about and came closer to hear.

Raeburn called Heddon. He came from Old Bill's room, glanced quickly fore and aft like a man who smells trouble, then in three long strides confronted the men, said, "What you fellows want?" and stopped, scowling as he waited for the answer.

Two or three men cleared their throats, one waited for another to speak; there was nudging and half furtive glances toward each other, much shuffling of feet. These were not signs of trouble.

"What's the matter, Haskell?" Heddon asked of the one sailor forward that he rather liked, a quite willing fellow who had an habitual air of seeming rather ashamed of himself.

"Cap'n, y' may think us crazy—we are 'most—y'see, Cap'n, we've been thinkin' an' talkin'—I don't know jus' how to say it, Cap'n, so it won't sound crazy—an' we are near craz—"

Pelew, who was seldom at a loss for words, shouted from across the deck:

"Aw, ——, it's about that —— snake! They want it thrown overboard!"

At that, Madame, who was watching and listening with her head turned to see over the back of her chair, got out of her chair and to her feet in one astonished bound, faced about, glanced angrily at Pelew, who had put a good deal of feeling into his voice, then she stared at Heddon, who looked behind him, straight at her.

"Ye'sir, that's it!" said Haskell, relieved.

"That snake, mister," said another's voice.

"No wind with it aboard, sir!" said one.

All spoke readily enough now that the situation had been explained, and one or two glanced as if a bit gratefully toward old Pelew.

"We ain't what you call superstichus but—"

"We are too! I am f'r one! I'm —— superstichus about—"

"An' see here, Will," said Old Tom, slipping the knife into his hip-sheath, and walking over closer to the crew. "I'm with 'em when it comes to that. We've had bad luck, an' somethin' is to blame. 'Sides, Will, it's laid a spell on Old Bill. I b'lieve them things. An' hey-O Abdul, what d'ye say?"

Abdul, who had been dozing, rubbed his head as if washing it, got ponderously to his feet, and looked about slowly. He scratched at his bare hairy breast and he said dully:

"Shnakes iss badt tings ter monkey mit. Dot feller iss *der Teufel* his —— self. But I ain'dt suberstichus. I ain'dt suberstichus aboudt noddings dot I can gedt my hands on. He monkey mit me und I'll preak his —— neck. I don't like the vay he spidts his —— tongue ad me und—"

"Peeg!" Madame shouted. "He make of you jellee! He hate you! Your name if zat I say to heem, he hiss-s-s-s!" Her eyes were bright with anger as she hissed, imitatively. Then—"But oh, monsieurs, he do no harm, no wrong! He is zere. He do not come out! He is so geentle as a leetle babee! He is all zat I haf an' so manee, manee years he has been wiz me—plees, monsieurs!"

Some man of the crew shouted—

"But wot's the good of 'im!"

"What, monsieur, is ze good of anysing zat you love!"

"Love!" said Old Tom, with a sound like a snort, and others made vague sounds of astonishment.

"Monsieur Hed-don! Monsieur, eet is to you zat I appeal. Plees!"

Heddon had noticed without pleasure that Madame for the past two or three days had been just a bit obtrusively humble. She had gone out of her way to say to him—"*Bon jour, monsieur*"—and seemed to take his answering grunt like a penitent, which caused him to have increase of suspicion. Moreover, he was quite willing to snap up an excuse for ridding the ship of the devil Baal-Phelgor, for Heddon, almost as much as any one unfamiliar with snakes, had the traditional dislike and fear of them. This gigantic serpent was impressive. Heddon did not have the slightest superstitious taint as regarded the calm; but many nights, and many times on some nights, he had been startled out of restless sleep by the feeling that he sensed or heard the thing crawling about. He had no idea just how much of a fight so big a snake as that could make, but he gave it the benefit of a highly unfavorable opinion. As for Madame herself, whatever her humbleness or any other propitious attitude, he was not likely ever to forget the negro Zudag.

"How much is it worth?" asked Heddon.

Madame with startled suspicion seemed to detect what he had in mind, and with both hands out, pleadingly, asked:

"How ver' much is anysing worth, monsieur, zat you love?"

"Name a price and if we get treasure maybe we'll—"

"I weel not! Nevare! No! Eet would be like to sell a babee! He knows ever' word zat I say to heem, monsieur!"

"Then tell him to crawl in his box, or we'll break in a port and use guns on him!"

"Monsieur! Oh you can not be so crueel! He do no wrong! He is geentle! He is all zat I haf!"

"There's nothing for the brute to eat. He'll starve or—"

"Is zat his fault? He do not complain like—"

"I suppose you'd say is that his fault if he tried to swallow some one of the crew some night! The snake goes overboard, and that's flat. I've had it in mind for a long time myself. This is now as good a time as any. Tom, get some guns up here and we'll—"

The surprized men of the crew babbled in grateful excitement; they had expected Heddon to jeer at them. Though there was not the discipline on this ship as on most, the impression had never for a moment sneaked into their minds that Heddon was not the captain, as dangerous and nearly as truculent as the usual captain who seemed unwilling, ever, to let a crew think themselves even half-way right in any complaint.

Madame rushed closer. Her hands fluttered; she begged; it seemed that she was about to weep:

"No, no, no, no! It mus' not be! Plees! Oh, haf ze mercy! Leetle Baal-Phelgor is like a person to me! He do no harm—oh plees! Oh you nice beeg strong men, why you be so crueel! Oh ze lonely nights he has been wiz me! Oh plees, plees, plees! He do not make the no wind! Oh, you know he do not! Plees!"

She was a woman, pleading; the men of the crew wavered uneasily; but Heddon said:

"Aye, it's hard luck for little Baal-Phelgor that he's a symbol of the Devil, and bears an old-time devil's name. I'm just Christian enough to want him overboard. And if he hasn't brought us any bad luck, he's —— likely to. Tom, break out the guns!"

"You mean zat! No! No! Oh, Monsieur Pelew, oh I beg, I beg you weel help me to make zem not do thees!"

Pelew glared doubtfully, but hesitated.

"Oh you crueel weeked men to keel my leetle pet!"

"*Joujou!*" said Heddon. "Like Zudag!"

What Pelew might or might not have done, no one, himself perhaps as little as any, could have told; but "Zudag" made even her stiffen, startled.

"Zudag!" she cried. "You gif me blame for zat! I deed not do eet! Oh you beeg coward men! I hate you! *You!*"—she turned on Pelew, screaming at him— "You, *you* sent Zudag to do zat! You beg me to keel thees captain so you can be captain—but I weel not do eet! Eet is so! He do zat, Monsieur Hed-don! I say to heem, no, no! Nevare! I tell ze truth now. I do not care! Now, monsieur, you see how ver' much I am your friend! He has ze hate of you, He has ze hate of you! Not me! No, no! nevare! *Monsieur, il y va de votre tête!*" This, "Your life is in danger!" accompanied by a look wildly anxious, was said in a tone confidential, tense, as if she risked her life to give him warning, even in French.

Heddon glanced at the astounded Pelew, whose mouth hung open; he was muddled with anger, blankly speechless, and stared from under a dazed sort of frown.

A scowl and grin mingled on Heddon's face:

"It's the Devil tempts you to say untrue things, Madame! So overboard with him. And now!"

Madame glared like one who has been tricked. She had been tricked, though by herself. Still, she blamed Heddon for not believing her.

"Brute-beast, you! Nevare! To do zat you mus' keel me firs'! I go an' I stay wiz heem!"

She turned and with a frantic haste like one attempting rescue, ran to her room, trembled fumblingly for a moment in unlocking the door, then passed through, and the bulkhead vibrated from the jar of the door's closing.

All stared in lingering silence toward the door; then Heddon faced about, looked at Pelew, laughed, but not pleasantly. Pelew's eyes were full of suspicion, bold yet a little doubtful. He did not say that it was true or false, did not say anything, and silence at any time was strange in him, but he appeared either still astounded or as if he felt that explanation would be too much like begging off. His bearing was full of sullen menace and he seemed to expect all the men to jump at him.

"She lied—" it was Heddon that said it—"She tried to stir up trouble so we'd forget the snake. But we won't! We're not likely ever to be friends, Pelew. You've said as much, and I find you keep your word about as well as any man. As for her, she's not clever—as women go. Doesn't lie at all well. The snake's safe now, but the heat will drive her out, or hunger if need be. And when she comes, we'll stand by to smash a port and open fire."

Those who were looking toward the small window of her room saw a shadow move behind the glass as Madame, who had been listening, straightened up and stepped aside.

THE afternoon was pitilessly hot, though the sky was thickened to eastward with white towering clouds of the type known to text-book sailors as *pillar cumulus*, to forecastle men as "ghosts," because they had no wind in them, but seemed to float straight up and down. Just before sundown catspaws flickered over the ocean, like shoals of tiny fish breaking water, but hardly a breath touched the bark.

That night the sky was full of stars overhead and to the west, but the east was darkly banked with ghosts; and the moon that had been so lean when they were first becalmed came up fat and radiant from behind the low-lying clouds.

Heddon had the first watch. At ten o'clock a breeze came on board, cool as a caressing hand. It shook the sails, gave the bark a sudden push, rattling blocks and drew a squeak or two of delight out of the yards; it flapped the awnings a time or two, but, even as Heddon went forward to bellow at the dark lumps lying about the deck, it died out.

Just before midnight, Heddon saw lightning break the horizon with repeated flashes, dim, far off—a thunderless twinkling at the eastern rim of the world. Though he watched for an hour, hardly moving his eyes, he did not again see lightning.

About one o'clock he roused Old Tom; and Tom, when he took a look at the time, began to row crabbedly.

"What ye mean, not callin' me as ye ort? I won't have no favors showed when it comes to work. I'm good a man as ye, Will Heddon, to stand my watch. You git off my deck."

"Shut up. You don't mean it and I'm tired of liars. I'll be with you the rest of the night. There's wind coming!"

"Does feel a bit like change," said Tom, peering about.

Then he went into the galley, drank a cup of cold coffee, smoked his pipe, took a turn about the deck, and feeling more sociable, came near Heddon and said—

"Snake woman ain't on deck, Will."

Heddon put a hand to his hip; and Old Tom, curious, asked:

"What ye got? Gun? Hump! Ye're goin' do it, then?"

"I usually do what I say, if it's a —— fool thing to do—don't I?"

"That ain't no sech thing! I b'lieve in Joners. I've seen 'em work. But how can she stand snake-stink in a hot room, like now?"

"How does the Devil stand the smell of sulphur?"

"That's right. Ye'd think he'd suffercate. Maybe she will too."

"Let's hope so," said Heddon.

"That Vee-ouks, he ain't nowhere round on the deck tonight, neither. I looked f'r him, pertickler. But Say Lean, he's settin' quiet with his eyes open. Don't he ever sleep, Will?"

"Go kick your friend Abdul in the ribs. You're the only one that dares go near him, and his snores'll start the timbers!"

"Must be easy in his conscience, Will."

"Light ballasted in his head, I'd say."

"Aye, but I like 'im. Ain't many I'll say it of on this ——er. But the ol' cook, him too. I can't un'erstan' what Abdul says half the time, n'r Woo Lung half as much as that. Maybe it's why I like 'em. Nothin' they say makes me mad—like the way you talk to a feller. Time's come, Will Heddon, when if I didn't like you so well I wouldn't like ye at all."

"All right, you talk to the wind-gods a while. Coax 'em on board. I'm going in for another look at Bill."

"Last few days he's sufferin' bad, Will."

"He's dying. An' on a crazy hell-ship with nothing but salts and arnica in the medicine chest. To —— with such a mess as we've made of it! And Hellward bound we are! No need of a wind to hurry a man on the Devil's lee shore."

II

OLD BILL was gaunt and weak; his eyes had settled deep in their sockets, glowing with a sullen feverishness, and at times he muttered vaguely, out of his head. Heddon had done everything he knew, working with gentle patience and cheerfulness, but being nothing of a doctor he did not know what to do. There was a bad smell from the wounds, discoloration, pus. The room was hot even with the punkah. Bill had dread of lying in the dark, so a lantern was kept burning.

Now when Heddon entered the old fellow did not move, but lay wide-eyed, with a blank stare overhead. He asked for water.

Heddon poured water, warm tasteless stuff with a strong odor, and mixed with it a few spoonfuls of wine, and lifted his head; but after one or two swallows, Old Bill turned his face away, dropped back on the pillow and lay quiet.

"There'll be wind soon, Bill. Caught a glimmer of lightning to eastward."

Bill did not answer. He lay as if he had not heard. His roving eyes glanced feverishly past Heddon. His bare thick arms were shrunken; muscles that had taken their great strength from the tough cordage they had handled were now withered, and the chest that had breasted the flap of gale-blown canvas in the darkness of all the seas, was flattened now and moved with quick, gasping, shallow breathing.

Heddon turned the lantern wick up and down, adjusting it; and, hearing a step, faced about. It was Tom.

"How is he, Will?"

"Fine! He's coming along fine!"

Heddon lied with a pretense at heartiness, but his sidelong look and frown told the truth.

Old Bill cleared his throat, then in a vague empty voice, with eyes fixed overhead, spoke—

" 'Ow big is God?"

Tom glanced helplessly at Heddon, stared helplessly at Old Bill.

"So big is 'E that in 'Is palm all the oceans is like a drop 'r two o' water in your 'and or mine. It's in the Bible so."

"Aye," said Heddon. "But quiet, Bill."

"An' a ship to sea is nothin' but a speck. With all the oceans in the 'ollow of 'Is 'and, 'ow big's a ship before 'Is eyes? 'E carn't see us. An' 'E stands so 'igh the stars is spangles on 'Is robe—'ow can 'E 'ear?"

Old Bill stirred, lifting a shrunken arm, and stared at his hand, trying to imagine that his palm was God's and that all the oceans lay there. The hand dropped heavily. Old Bill sighed without hope.

"'E carn't see us. 'E carn't 'ear us. 'E don't care."

Heddon's tongue fumbled with unspoken words; nothing seemed suitable, so he put his hand on Old Bill's forehead, hot with fever as if from a brain on fire.

" 'Eaven?" said Old Bill, questioningly; then shook his head slightly, denying his right to Heaven. "I been a 'ypocrite an' talked foolish. I been a Pharersee. I been—"

"You've got your hands bone-deep with calluses from honest work to show—and that means Heaven!"

"Is that in Scripture?" Bill asked with quick eagerness, hopeful.

"Aye!" said Heddon.

Old Bill, with slow effort, lifted both hands and peered at them. For a moment he fingered the hard palms, warty with callouses, then his hands dropped wearily. Under the pressure of his hand upon the forehead, Heddon felt the old fellow shake his head, denying still his right to Heaven for he had been a hypocrite, talked vainly of holy things, stood before his fellows as one reproachfully righteous, prayed loudly as do the Pharisees.

III

IT WAS a little after eight bells that morning when Tom went forward and awakened Pelew. One touch, and Pelew was on his feet, fully awake, startled, ready for a fight; then seeing he had been called merely to take the watch, he grunted, yawned, stretched his arms, said—

"——! I been dreamin'."

It had been dark when Old Tom had peered into the chart-house and started forward; it was dawn when Pelew, at a touch, jumped to his feet—so quickly did day come. It was as if night with a gesture almost sudden drew away its dark hand from between the earth and the sun.

"What's wrong this mornin'?" demanded Pelew.

"Ol' Bill, he's dead."

"Ow!" said Pelew. "An' I liked that old un."

"All as knew 'im did."

Tom sucked vigorously on his empty pipe, for a moment looked blank-eyed at nothing, then glanced about and seeing that the weather was due for a change, went up into the bows and stared at the sky and sea with an old sailor's incommunicable understanding of what he saw and felt. Though shipmates die, sea and weather must be watched.

Abdul had awakened. He snored so much his mouth was parched, so he went forward to the scuttle butt, drank three cups of tepid water, grunted in distaste, scrubbed his head with his knuckles, yawned like a hungry giant; then he turned and started toward the quarterdeck to drop into a chair and perhaps doze off again.

Heddon, for two hours, had been leaning against a starboard davit, thinking. With the coming of daylight he looked at the clouds in the east. They seemed not to have moved since sunset; but were denser, and in the night he had seen lightning there, or dreamed it. Now he wasn't sure which.

Pelew, with Captain Scott's dress cap pulled slant-wise over one eye, sleeves rolled up and shirt wide open, came aft, came up to Heddon, said—

"Mornin', mister."

"Morning," said Heddon, not looking around.

Pelew popped his eyes in quick anger, for he had spoken in all friendliness, meaning a bit of sympathy for the dead shipmate; but Heddon did not notice. Pelew glanced about, and perhaps thinking a bit of sullenness from Heddon this morning was all right, went on toward the deck-house cabin.

His head was turned backward in a glance toward the sky as he lifted a foot over the coaming, and the foot came down on something slick, soft, muscular. There was an explosive hissing sound, a sudden stink of breath in Pelew's face; and though instantly he had yelled and jumped, he slipped in jumping backward. The python, with up-reared head, had struck at Pelew's head and bitten into his shoulder, and, simultaneously, as Pelew fell backward across the coaming and out on deck, his leg went up, and a writhing coil thrown quickly as a man's arm could have moved, fastened about the leg above the knee.

As Heddon came on the jump Pelew's hands, flying wildly, beat at the snake that, with head up, seemed to pause watchfully motionless as if suspicious of Heddon, yet at the same time was pouring its length of body across the coaming.

Abdul, with a flat-footed stride that jarred the deck, ran up, stopped by Heddon, bellowed—

"Dot —— snake is oudt!"

Heddon shot quickly, and missed. The python, as if a wary brain looked out through its eyes, drew back its up-lifted head, doubtfully, and for an instant, the merest of pauses, the entire body was motionless; and it seemed to forget Pelew though he writhed and screamed in curses. The great python had so much the air of intelligent wariness, as if judging the deadliness of its many enemies who hated it, who had meant to throw it overboard, that Heddon stared for a moment in a kind of fascinated stupor.

"Choot 'im! Choot!" Abdul bellowed, his mouth almost against Heddon's ear.

With one hand Abdul beat at his hairy breast, and he held the other hand out, pointing, as if he, too, held a gun.

Heddon shot and again missed. He was shooting at the small head, and it was as if the snake, too quick for the eye to follow, dodged.

"—— you, I'll—" Heddon cried and recklessly jumped forward, firing point-blank into the snake's body.

Quick as the flash of match to powder, the snake struck, caught Heddon breast-high and with a writhing flurry seemed to whip coils about Heddon as he, falling, struggled powerfully, and felt that death was upon him; but Abdul, the half giant, who was only a simple-minded fool, stooped, and with both great hands grasped the snake's neck, pulled the head away, wrenched, squeezed, jerked, pulled, stepping backward, and stared with pop-eyed challenge at the gaping mouth, with foul breath, that yawned at him.

Pelew rolled over, scrambled away, yelling; and men who came running, stopped, terrified, helpless. The revolver had been knocked from Heddon's hand and was lost somewhere under the snake's body.

Madame had said that Baal-Phelgor was wise, and full of hate for Abdul. It seemed that this was actually so; or else the snake, no wiser than any animal held by the throat, sensed that the only way to escape was to kill this man in the only way that a great snake could. The base of its jaws gave Abdul a hand-hold from which the python could not pull free; and Abdul, with noisy heaving and breathing, angered, excited, trampled this way and that, stamping, pulling, jerking, as he tried to break the supple neck.

Heddon, with one arm pinned to his side, was entangled in coils that slipped, as if the python crawled toward Abdul but still held fast to the other enemy, and squirm against that writhing hawser of muscles as he did, Heddon, now back down, now face down, could not get free in the very few seconds that seemed like a long fight. Again and again the sliding coils paused to squeeze constrictively, but with lessening force, for Abdul, grunting, puffing, swearing as he yanked, took the python's attention, and more and more of its length went from around Heddon's body toward Abdul, while the astonished men of the crew stood and stared as if frozen.

Old Tom had run for an ax; Raeburn, awakened by the noise, stood on the deck-house, looking down with a kind of blank horror at this hawser-like monster that fought two powerful men, with its mouth ferociously agape, at times almost against Abdul's face; and the length of body that reached between Heddon and Abdul's hands, writhed in whorls, powerfully; the thing struggled, as if for more than life—for the death of its enemies. The bight of its body whipped from the deck high in the air; it squirmed, twisted, doubled itself into swirling knots, all in a contortionate flurry.

Then a man of the crew, with a face paler than his ghost would ever be, leaped forward with arms outflung, grapplingly; the body of the snake struck him aside, knocking him down many feet away; and the python, which had seemed to regard Heddon as a sort of anchor to keep itself from being dragged all over the deck, suddenly let go of him and with great writhing flurries rapidly coiled around and around Abdul.

Abdul's bellow ended in a hoarse gasp; his eyes bulged; he staggered drunkenly, lost balance under the crushing weight that was wrapped about him and toppled headlong. His mouth was wide open, his eyes were frightfully distended; the muscular coils about him rippled with constrictive pressure, and the python lashed its free length of tail as if to knock away other men who might come into the fight; but Abdul's hands were clamped still at the throat of the snake.

Men came with a rush. Young Raeburn leaped from the deck-house; Haskell, the man of the crew who had been knocked aside, ran in head down as if blindly to where Heddon struggled with the free length of the snake's body, trying to unwind the coils. Old Tom had come with an ax, but he jumped about, swearing futilely, afraid to strike lest the blow glance on Abdul or against some other of the men that seemed to flounder all over the python, pulling at the slippery body that squirmed free of their hands.

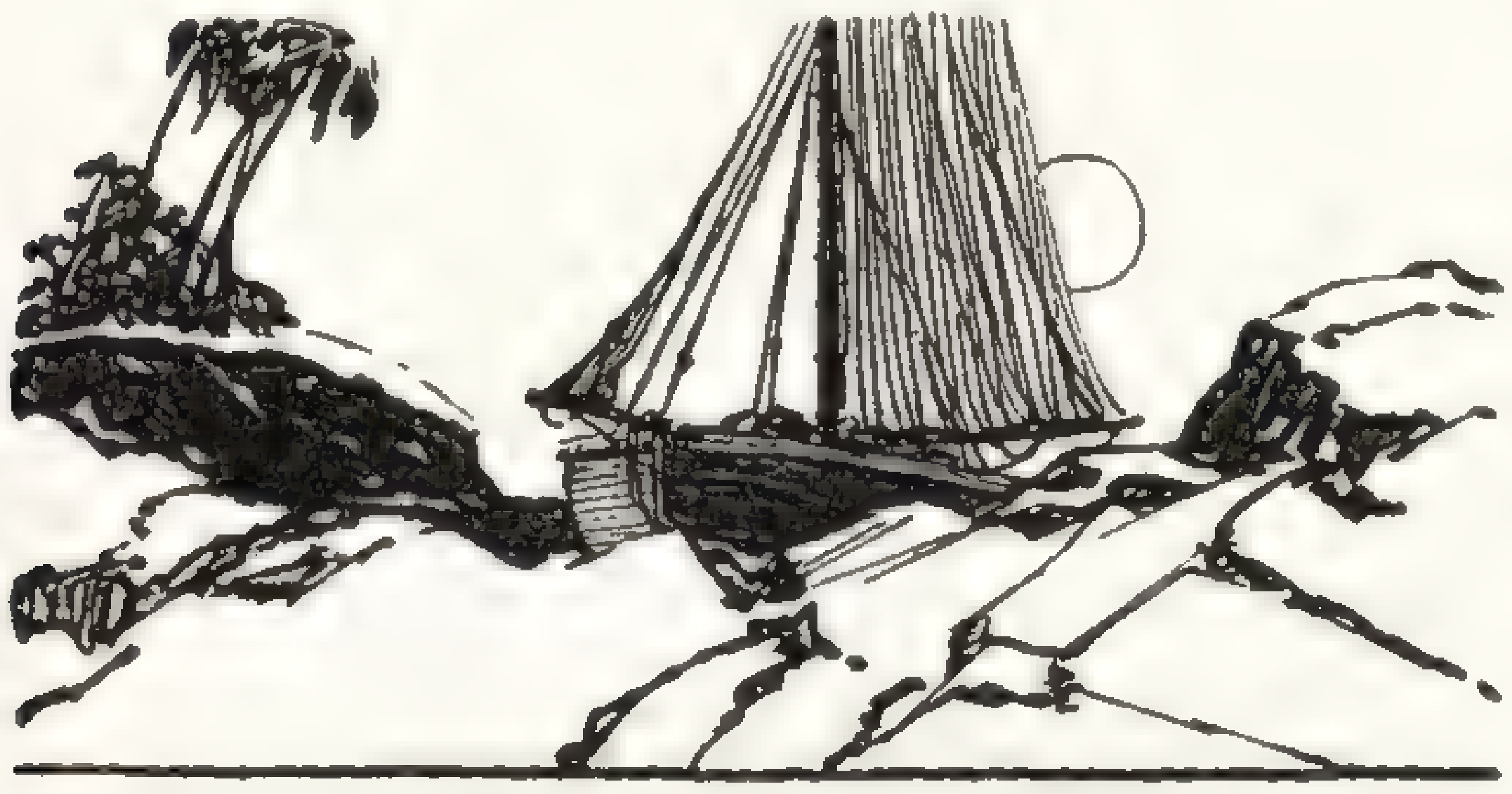
Then T'eeay Layeen, with a cool, quick, outreaching gesture, took away the ax from Old Tom, and drove the blade into the deck, half severing the snake's neck, striking through the backbone, a hand's breadth below Abdul's fingers.

The python broke its coils and thrashed convulsively, scattering the men, tripping and knocking them about, covering them with blood. With another blow, quickly, skillfuly given, T'eeay Layeen severed the head. The python was killed but not lifeless; for a time it thrashed in a way that made the men stand far off; and the headless body rippled and twisted powerfully, as if still blindly trying to fight, till the men, sickened by the stench and feel of its blood-slimed body, gathered the thing up and heaved it overboard. The head that lay on the deck still gaped at them as if defiantly.

And Abdul, crushed internally, suffering a pain as terrible as poison, died there.

Heddon wearily got from his knees beside Abdul and looked about. Young Raeburn, blood-smeared, was huddled down by a scupper, vomiting; the fellow out of the crew, Haskell, lay face down on the deck, on his forearm, and would have seemed dead, so covered was he with blood, but for the heaving of his body as his breath came in sobs. Old Tom stood with fists clenched and stared as if about to blubber. T'eeay Layeen, motionless at the bulwark, as if a little awed, looked down into the water where the body of the great snake floated and moved as if still alive.

And wind, a strong wind, a hustling, puffing wind, came on board the bark and shook her as if impatient to know why she loitered thus when the calm was broken.



THE bark lay aback in the good strong wind that men with curses and prayers had been trying to raise for the best part of a month; and while some cleaned up about the deck, others stitched the shroud for better men than themselves. Old Bill, too, would have his burial this hour.

A fellow picked up the snake's head to toss it over the side; but Heddon, as if his brain was really streaked with madness, said:

"Not much you don't! Here, you, Jack! Sew that up with Abdul!"

"You mean it, Will?" asked young Raeburn, who looked as sick and pale as a sick girl, and was helping Old Tom with the shrouds.

"Mean it? You know I mean it! Would you cheat a dead man of his right to Heaven? Let him go to God with the thing in his hands and show 'em up there he's been a devil-fighter. Saints wear armor of sun-scales and lightning for a lance—Abdul, bare-handed! ——, what a man!"

No grating was large enough to serve for his burial couch, and the main hatch cover, the same on which Abdul had slept all through the calm, was unshipped, and here wrapped in canvas he was taking his last sleep on board the ship.

Little Vioux, looking like one who had awakened from a debauch and was already being tortured for such sinfulness, had come on deck, peering about uneasily, furtively. He blinked at the sunlight and squeezed his head as if to keep the throbs from breaking his skull.

At the sight of him, Heddon swung about, ominously—

"Where's that woman?"

Vioux, startled, protested:

"I do not know, monsieur! I know nothin'. *Mordieu,* how I have the suffering!"

"I'd like that she stands by to see this burial—there'll be much in it that won't please her!"

"I have not seen her, monsieur!" said Vioux, with a whining anxiousness.

His uneasy eyes seemed more crossed than ever as he watched Heddon and nervously rubbed his bristly cheeks. Vioux now raised a beard.

"No one has seen her. Maybe she died when Abdul strangled that snake—one life between 'em! That explains her love of it. We've got to see!"

Heddon's thoughts had in them the color that leads on to madness; he did not at all believe the things he said, but said them, which is the beginning of belief.

So Heddon, with some curious men at his heels, went to Madame's door and beat upon it. There was no answer. All the ports were open, but hardly more than enough to admit a man's thumb. As always when she was within the room, the ports were covered. One could not peer within.

"Bring an ax!" said Heddon; then he half absently tried the door. It was not locked. He threw it open, peered, then stepped inside.

Madame lay in bed as if asleep, or dead.

Heddon, with a jerk here and there, tore the curtains from the ports, then stood by the side of the bed, scowling down at the pale face of Madame, and belief that she was really dead fluttered about in his mind.

She must have suffered from heat during the night, have been nearly stifled. She lay with a bare arm hanging over the side of the bed, and her body was covered with only a rumpled sheet drawn nearly breast high.

A bubble or two of forgotten schoolboy learning rose to the surface of Heddon's thoughts: He recalled that Roman girls would cool themselves by entwining serpents about their naked bodies.

Madame lay face up, motionless, with mouth slightly open. He stooped, peering closely. Her eyes were barely parted, but motionless. He spoke. He touched her, awakeningly. There was not the shadow of a response. He put a hand on her forehead—it did not seem cold. The wig was set on her head firmly; the hair coiled down in a way that concealed its falseness.

"I don't think she's dead," said Heddon, half aloud, a bit doubtful. "Fainted maybe. No, she's shamming! Not cold—" he stooped again, peering intently at her motionless eyelids.

"Well," he said, speaking clearly, thinking that if she was conscious—and he was sure that she was—this would bring about signs of life, "she must be dead to lie like this. So we'll just take this sheet off—" he grasped the sheet by the hem as if to jerk—"carry her out, and wrap her in canvas, too!"

He stirred the sheet. For a moment the corpse-like form did not seem to be other than a corpse; then he, watchful, detected the faintest heave of the breast. She was neither dead, in a faint, nor asleep.

"All right, you win!" said Heddon, giving the sheet a fling, covering even her throat. "She's wide awake, but wants us to think she's half dead because—"

"Monsieur, permeet that I—" Vioux a little timidly plucked at Heddon's arm—"assist. Madame is ver'—ah—subject to ze faint, ze trance—"

Heddon gave him a shove; then turned to leave the room, but he paused at the door with a backward look, and though watching Madame's face, said to the men behind him:

"That's her game, and she wins it! The snake got loose—she doesn't know how. Was in a faint—long faint, since yesterday. Vioux there knew it was going to happen too. Last night he too slept indoors. Queer, but even knowing they lie, such is the power of a lie, that you can't wring her neck as I'd come near doing if she said outright she'd turned that thing loose!"

Heddon stepped outside the room and banged the door closed after him; then he faced about with sudden thought at Old Tom:

"—— me for a fool! Fingering that sheet didn't make her stir— I should have put my hand to her hair. If dead, she'd have grabbed at it!"

IV

IT TOOK eight men, four to a side, shoulder to shoulder, to lift the hatch cover to the top of the rail, and hold it there as the bark swayed and empty sails popped with much flapping as if in protest at this mummery when a stout wind blew.

Men looked at Heddon who stood bareheaded, empty-handed, his gaze broodingly on the great white long lump. There was long silence. All of the crew had their hands at the hatch cover, and the weight of it was heavy on their arms. With the rock of the bark their feet shifted unsteadily.

"From the time men have gone down to the sea in ships, I would say none has had such a burial as this and none will again. It's been my bad luck to have to stow away in deep water more than one good shipmate, and one among the best that ever gave to the sea all the years of his life lies now over the side. And if bravery means anything to God, He and this one here are both in Heaven now, watching what we do, hearing what we say.

"Aye, there's no knowing what's inside of a man until he's put to the test. If he'd died of sickness, we'd have heaved him over without a yard backed or a word spoken. We called him a big square-head, and thought him just that—how could we know? And I wonder does God Himself know until the man is dead? If He does, then what's the good of the struggles a man has to make? And if He doesn't, then who shapes the struggles so a man has the chance to show himself worthy of Heaven—like the thief on the cross? And who puts the heart into a man that makes him stand to a fight he knows he can't win? And where does it come from, such blood of man as locked his fingers till the thing he fought was dead?

"Not many days back, one went over the side because he didn't have a bit of poppy gun in a pipe; and too weak to win his fight. Did he go to Hell? God knows. And there must be a God, for the world is full of devils, and without Him they'd have everything their own way—more than they do.

"Here's one that's done his work. And he's taking along the old old symbol of the devil to show, as if such a tale as he's got to tell might be doubted even there! Aye, let him go!"

CHAPTER XII

AFTER THE CALM

THE bark, with the Jonah off her, ran before wind and rain for days; and when the clouds parted, the wind held on, at times gusty, again light as a maiden's breath, which as every one knows can blow men this way and that.

Heddon, short-handed and reckless, drove her along. True, he kept an eye on the barometer, and this told something, but gave no warning of the whooping squalls. They had some bad half hours, but when the men lifted their voices in anxious grumbling, Heddon said jeeringly:

"It's luck as saves a man from harm—saves any man. And if you're not lucky, you're better drowned!"

Pelew had changed a bit for the worse; he remained by far the best sailor, and took even more trouble to show that he was, as if thus making it plain how nearly worthless the others were; and showed off, too, with risks aloft that would have put any other man overboard; but he seemed to care less what ill-feeling and quarrels with the crew might bring upon the ship. He particularly abused the sailor Haskell, taunted him, cursed him for a lubber. The way of a treacherous woman with a man may have had something to do with Pelew's discontent; but more than this was his awareness that all men thought he had been a coward when the python was loose. As if to prove his courage, he was on edge for a fight with anybody, and would almost demand it if he found any one staring at him.

Oddly enough, he seemed now half-way, but hardly more, to like Heddon; and though Pelew would not let any one stare at him, he often looked with a blank sort of puzzlement at Heddon, from behind his back. One thing was certain, Heddon was reckless enough as a skipper to satisfy even Pelew's lawless delight in taking chances that terrified other men.

Heddon had become aware that often he was being stared at from behind, though not by Pelew. Time and again he had detected the little Chinese girl staring at him from a corner of the deck-house, or through a dark doorway. It exasperated him; it exasperated him all the more because he could not feel as angry as he wished. She was a toy girl, a dainty doll that breathed and spoke and laughed, with dark moist eyes. He did not want her; did not dislike her, but simply would not have her.

She was a pleasing little thing, though Heddon simply wouldn't be pleased. The inexhaustible Woo Lung, who from almost the first sight had worshiped at her small feet, somehow from his chest, or with what he could pillage, and with fresh water, soap and the lid of a stove for a pressing iron, had proudly seen to it that she was dressed as nearly like a princess as possible.

Her dark almond eyes would always be wide as she looked at Heddon, and her red lips parted breathlessly. She conveyed very well and a little shamelessly that she wished him to know that he was worshiped; and after a pause, as if afraid of displeasing him, for always he scowled darkly at her, she would draw back quickly, and the long jade earrings tapped her cheeks as if they too trembled.

Vioux and Madame had quarreled again. Heddon brazenly eavesdropped. Vioux called her a bungling fool of a woman, said she was unlucky, that he washed his hands of her, that she was never to speak to him again—never!

Madame was no longer Madame. It was as if the python, which she had once said could when it wished almost draw the life out of her, had with its death drawn out of her what was more precious than life—courage. Much of her audacity had been merely the impulsive scheming of a selfish, cruel, foolish woman; but she had at least been high-tempered and dangerous. Now she begged so worthless a fellow as Vioux not to desert her. He swore at her.

Vioux was much on deck, and would sit all day long and half the night staring away at nothing. Men noticed that he was growing a beard. Heddon now and then stepped aside to kick him out of the way, but for the most part contemptuously let him alone.

But Madame did not stir from her room and Heddon at times caught a glimpse of her through an open port where she stood to get fresh air. Her face was shrunken, her expression weary, dull, almost unintelligent. She was no longer at all the woman he had known. Something within her had died.

TO BE CONTINUED

Here's T. T. Flynn's

New story of Railroad People

The Super of the Santee

PESSIMISM lay thick over every mile of the Santee Division of the D. & R. From Sky City to Santee and from Santee to Petersburg, the end of the division, gloom stalked in the stations, the switch shanties and the shops.

The cause of it was the short, heavy-set McGann, who had been sent out from the East by the powers-that-be to fill the chair of division superintendent.

There were many things said about McGann during the first thirty days he was over the Santee Division. The mildest was that he was a loud mouth, a braggart and a bully.

Harsh words, those. Yet, in a measure, true. For McGann did not know how to rule men. His sudden jump to power, due, rumor had it, to a marriage connection with a powerful member of the board, went to his head. He thrived on his prerogative of calling men down.

His office in the second story of the Santee Union Station was nicknamed the Bull Ring. There, practically every morning of the world, gathered a group of unfortunates who had strayed from the path of routine and perfection and had been ordered upon the carpet.

McGann ridiculed their weaknesses, bullied them because of their mistakes, suspended some for different periods, fired others, bawled every one out—and in each case took good care to hold McGann up as a model of every virtue included in the annals of man.

In between times he rode up and down the division and made himself obnoxious.

A sore was McGann on the side of the entire Santee Division. Not a man who did not wish heartily for his downfall. Something, at least, that would close his mouth.

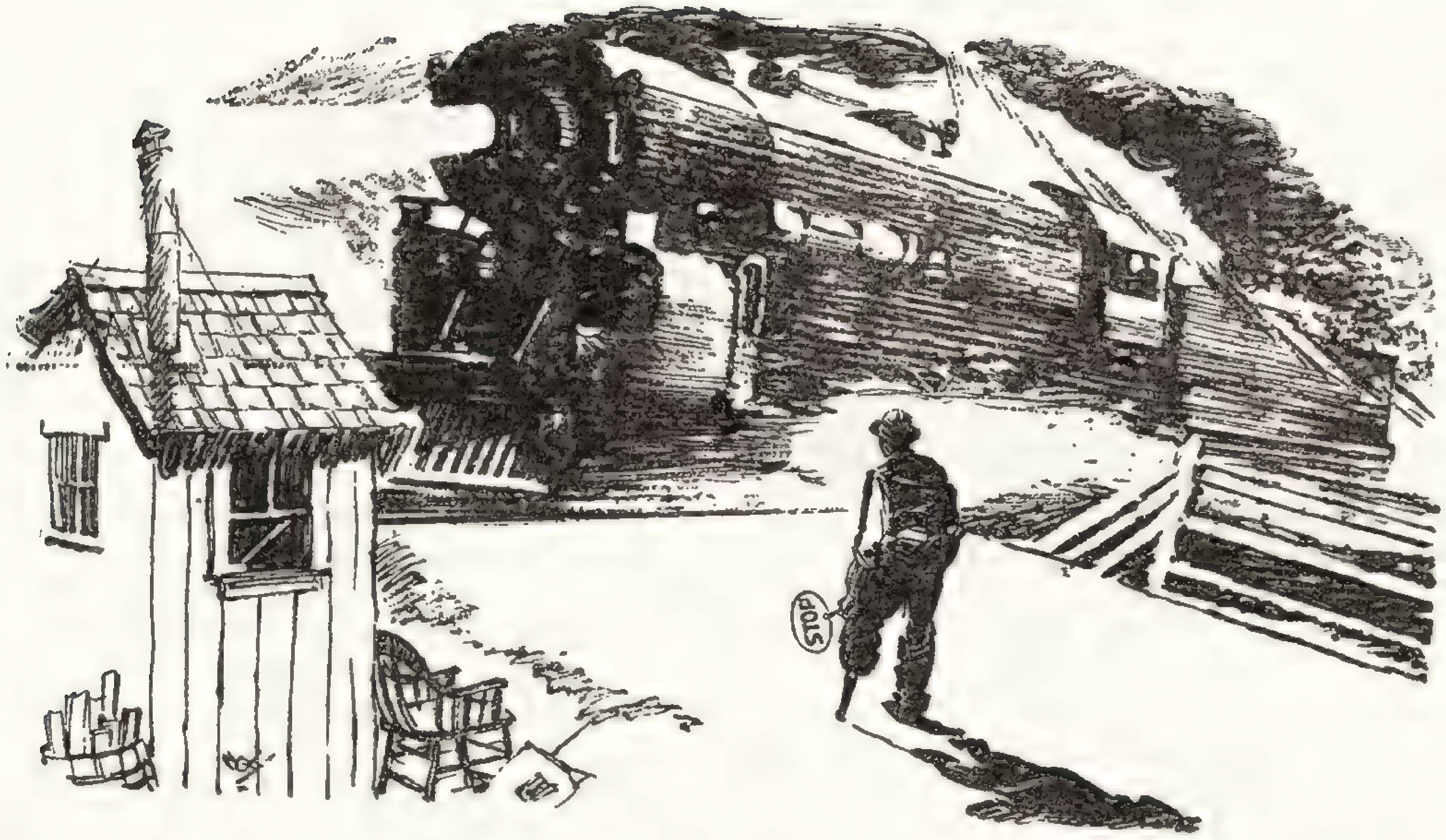
In the second month McGann was humbled.

The advent of the President's Special was the first link.

When the President of the United States leaves his White House and travels about the country it is a time of tension and apprehension on those lines over which he elects to travel. For custom has decreed that the President and his party be sped on the way smoothly and swiftly.

Man is human. Liable to error. But it is not supposed to crop out when the President's Special passes. And so much labor is expended in preparation, and many men, from the super down to the track-walkers, are on their toes until the Special passes out of their field of responsibility.

This time Paddy Reese was assigned the throttle of the President's train from Santee to Petersburg. Paddy Reese, the fat, the gay, whose hair was graying but whose heart was younger every day. Paddy Reese, who once snaked the Hill and Plain Express across the Santee Division for a year



and two months and never lost a minute. They picked Paddy because he was one of the best.

And Paddy coupled his fresh engine to the Special as it paused a few minutes in the Santee station after the run from Sky City. Took a last hasty look around the machinery, settled his bulk firmly on the cab seat, knotted his blue bandanna tighter around his neck, dropped his goggles around his neck, drew on his gauntlets, got the high ball, and eased his huge superheater into motion as sweetly as ever a soft summer breeze touched a maiden's cheek.

A nice run it promised to be.

And then, somewhere in the first fifty miles, Watkins, the fireman, touched the scoop handle with the end of his rake. The scoop, that flexible lip beneath the tank which the fireman lowers as they run over a long, shallow, water-filled trough stretched between the rails, and which scoops the water out of that trough, saving a stop at a water-tank, swung down.

As they thundered past the next little station, the heavy crossing planks caught the low-hanging lip and put it out of commission.

A second time Watkins struck the valve. Saw it that time, thought he had just moved it, and put it back in position.

When they roared over the long trough and the broken scoop scattered water out between the Special and a long freight which was passing, Watkins let the matter go at that.

He worked his fire for the next few minutes. And by the time he struggled over the top of the coal with a lighted lantern, lifted the tank lid, and discovered that the scoop had failed, they were past Twin Pine water-tower. And no water in sight before Petersburg, the end of the Santee Division.

Paddy Reese took the news with a grin, shrugged his fat shoulders, and cut the valve action a trifle leaner to conserve steam.

"We'll make it stretch," he shouted to Watkins above the roar of their progress.

And Paddy did his best. But luck was against him. The water didn't stretch far enough. Even after the injectors gave a last gurgle and lapsed into uselessness Paddy drove her. But five miles from Petersburg his prudence got the upper hand. And he stopped the Special right on the main line, ordered Watkins to bank his fire black, and telephoned for a fresh engine to pull them in.

THE Special was an hour late. The Santee Division drew a black mark. The throng which had gathered at the Petersburg station to watch the President pass had time to cool its heels. And back in Santee, McGann had fourteen cat fits right in a row.

There was but one outcome. Paddy Reese and Watkins were ordered to the Bull Ring the next morning.

They met outside the D. & R. station in Santee the next morning, Paddy with his fat figure draped in a loose blue suit, and a black derby on his head, Watkins in the more stylish clothes of a young bachelor.

On Paddy's face was a cheerful grin. It broadened as he saw the apprehensive air which cloaked Watkins.

"Is it a funeral?" he asked with a chuckle.

"A wake at least, I'm thinkin'," Watkins retorted gloomily.

"Pish, laddie!" And Paddy clapped his tall young fireman on the shoulder. "That's no way to be feelin'. We're only goin' up to the Bull Ring. We'll hear a great collection of that same stuff, 'tis true. But this McGann can't talk all morning—an' afterward we'll take in a movie. Brighten up your headlight, son!"

"He'll be out for blood this morning. I heard that the general manager sent him a hot telegram."

"Then I'll give him a full pint o' me blood, running over fer good measure. But not an' ounce o' flesh does the blatherskite get. 'Twas an accident pure an' simple. Though, mayhap, I should have had you go back at once an' make sure the tank was filled. Still an' however, don't take it so hard. There was no lives lost. An hour, even if it was the President's time, don't call fer a couple o' human sacrifices. Let's go up an' get it over with."

With a dubious shake of his head Watkins followed his fat friend.

McGann had not yet entered the Bull Ring. Seven or eight other unfortunates were waiting in the small outer office. Several recognized Paddy and greeted him joyfully:

"Here's the victim! Death to you, Paddy."

"No fair sleeping out on the road when you're haulin' the President, Paddy. I could have told you that."

"Say, Paddy! Did you do it on purpose, because you lost a ten-dollar bet last election?"

Paddy tossed his derby up and caught it dexterously. Then beamed upon them.

"What are you poor divils in for?" he queried slyly. "It's a bad day fer you. McGann'll eat you up, because the Special was late yesterday."

"Thanks to you, you poor length o' tripe!"

Just then steps sounded in the hall. The men looked at one another and grew quiet.

Paddy grinned at them.

The next moment the heavy-set McGann strode through the door. His black brows were bent in a scowl. His right hand clutched a folded morning paper.

He stopped just inside the door and looked them over, striking his right leg with impatient slaps of the paper.

"Are you Reese?" he suddenly snapped at Paddy, though he had looked square in his face as Paddy was oiling around the Special the day before.

Paddy nodded.

"I am that," he admitted.

"Where is your fireman?"

Watkins moved his hand.

McGann hunched his head lower and glared at them. And then, as he frequently did, kept them in the small anteroom, before an audience, for their bawling out. He seemed to get a kick out of having witnesses.

"Why," he demanded icily, "didn't the President's Special make Petersburg on time?"

"Because, sor," said Paddy blandly, "I stopped her five miles this side o' Petersburg an' sent in fer another engine to haul us in."

McGann's face reddened.

"I know that!" he snapped. "What was your reason for stopping?"

"The tank was dry an' the water in the boiler was below the level o' the last gauge cock. 'Twas courtin' death to run her a mile farther."

McGann had received every detail within an hour after Paddy reached Petersburg the evening before. But he played with the situation.

"Why wasn't there any water in the tank?"

"The scoop was put out o' commission before we reached the trough. An' when we found we had not taken water we was past Twin Pine water-tower. I thought I could make Petersburg. An' I would have —if it'd been five miles nearer."

McGann looked sharply at Paddy to see if there was any sign of levity about him. But Paddy's face was as smooth and serious as a Chinese Buddha.

"It is my opinion," said McGann with a sneer, "that you are a poor engineer. You don't know your business. How you ever lasted this long on the D. & R. is a mystery to me."

"Yes, sor," agreed Paddy politely.

McGann continued deliberately.

"Furthermore, I think you are a coward!"

Paddy blinked his eyes and rolled them at the men who were witnessing his bitter dose. Then looked back at McGann. He was not cowed, for he asked—

"You do?"

"I do! A poor engineer—and a coward. A disgrace to the road!"

"What makes ye think that?"

"You stopped out on the road last night when you were almost in Petersburg. If you had kept your head and your nerve you could have brought your train in. And the Santee Division wouldn't be the joke of the rest of the road."

"The water was gettin' down on the crown plates."

"A weak excuse! You merely thought it was that low. You might have had enough water to go twenty-five miles farther."

"Yes," said Paddy, "and I might have killed me fireman, meself, an' the President too."

McGann shook his head and his every word was an insult.

"A —— thin excuse, Reese! You can't crawfish with me that way. I say you could have made Petersburg! If I had been at the throttle I would have taken the Special right into the station. Thank heavens, I'm not a sniffling coward!"

Paddy lost his aplomb. His face grew red. Then paled. His hands clutched the brim of his derby until the knuckles went white.

"You would?" was all he could say.

"I would! I'm a man who finishes anything I start. If I had set out to put the President in Petersburg on time I would have done so, short of a wreck."

Paddy said nothing.

"Unfortunately there are no rules dealing with your particular brand of cowardice," said McGann bitingly. "I can't very well discharge you, though I would like to do so. But I want every man on the road to know the sort you are—and the way I feel about it. I am going to suspend you both for five trips. And after this I'll keep my eye on you. Watch your step, Reese! When I see a man like you I weed him out as soon as possible."

Paddy had to stand and take it. For, after all, a mere engineer can't talk back to a division super. Not a veteran engineer with his life behind him and only a few more years until retirement sets him free. No. He might lose his retirement along with his job, and find himself with no trade and no youth. It behooves such a man to walk carefully.

McGann said a few more biting words. Then pushed on by and entered his office.

Paddy stood a long moment and looked at the door which closed behind the super. Then he said prayerfully, to no one in particular—

"If I could get him in a dark room alone, fer three minutes!"

And then Paddy clapped his derby on his head, turned on his heel and left the room, followed by Watkins.

PADDY and Watkins served their suspension.

And then began a period of misery for Paddy. The eight who had witnessed his treatment at the hands of McGann told others. And up and down the entire division the tale spread.

Everywhere Paddy went he was greeted with chaffing. Not a man who did not know that McGann had strayed far from the truth. Not a man who did not sympathize with Paddy. Yet the chance to poke fun was too good to miss. They kidded him unmercifully.

For once in his life they got under Paddy's skin. McGann had struck too deep. Every reference to the matter smarted. Paddy's usual ready retorts withered and died under the surge of his feelings when the matter was brought up. He began to grow moody and nurse a festering dislike for McGann.

Three trips he made after he returned from his suspension. And reported at the Santee roundhouse for the fourth. He was running No. 17 at the time, leaving Santee at nine in the evening, and arriving in Petersburg a little after one in the morning. A fairly fast train, No. 17, though not approaching the running time of the Hill and Plain Express. Still, a moderately fast run. The engine was a good one.

As was his wont Paddy arrived at the roundhouse early. And while he was changing into his work clothes he suffered another barrage of chaff from several crews who had finished their runs and were getting ready to go home.

To escape it, Paddy hurried into his work clothes, drew his oil and waste at the oil house, and went out on the ready lot. There his engine, repaired, greased, oiled and watered, stood ready for the moment when the touch of his hand on the throttle would change it from a sleeping mass of steel to a fire-breathing monster of terrible power and speed.

It was the lull hour of the evening. A group of runs had just gone out. No. 17 was the only one scheduled to leave before midnight.

The ready lot was almost bare of engines. Several slow, massive freight hogs, a couple of little yard pots, and the huge, trim passenger locomotive assigned to No. 17 were the only engines there.

Paddy climbed up into the cab, switched on the lights, put his lunch-box under the seat, looked at the water, stirred up the fire a little, and then cracked the blower so the fire would be warming up. Then took his long-spout oil can, a wad of waste, a wrench, an oil torch, left the cab and began to oil around and inspect the machinery.

He was standing by the right cross-head when Watkins came up out of the darkness and stopped in the shaft of light streaming down from the cab.

"Early aren't you?" Watkins called.

"No," replied Paddy moodily. "It's just late you are." And he buried his can and half his body from sight as he climbed on the guide step and leaned in to oil the driving brake cylinder.

Watkins climbed up into the cab. Several minutes later the left injector overflow pipe spouted steam as he pulled the starting valve handle to put more water in the boiler.

The injector did not prime. Again and again Watkins opened and closed the starting valve. He was still working when Paddy climbed back up in the cab.

"What's the matter?" Paddy asked.

"The son-of-a-gun won't work," Watkins replied as he pulled the handle out once more.

It failed again.

Paddy crossed the cab.

"Let me have a try at it," he said.

But Paddy had no better luck. The injector wouldn't prime. At last he gave it up as a bad job and opened the right one.

"That'll have to be fixed," he called above the injector's whine. "Better go in an' get a man to work on it."

Watkins nodded, swung down from the cab and hurried off into the night.

Paddy looked at his watch. A good half-hour remained before they were due to leave the ready lot. He sank on his seat, draped his feet on the foot rest, leaned back, lighted a cigaret, and let his moody thoughts stray to the subject of McGann and the various things he would like to see happen to the loud-mouthed super.

The cigaret was burning perilously close to his fingers and, in his thoughts, McGann had suffered several varieties of violent punishment, when Paddy suddenly caught the sound of running feet spurning the cinder ballast out in the darkness.

Closer. And a form suddenly burst into the light by the cab steps and swung up into the cab. It was Bracket, the gaunt roundhouse foreman. He was breathing heavily from the run.

"McGann just called up!" he burst out. "His wife got struck by an auto a little while ago, in Sky City! She's dying! They got McGann on long distance and told him a surgeon here in Santee is the only hope! He's great on brain operations! He's the last chance—and if he isn't there by eleven o'clock he can't do any good!

"McGann said he would be at the station in ten minutes with the surgeon! He wants a light engine there to take him and the surgeon to Sky City! You'll have to go! You're qualified over that part of the division!"

Paddy sat bolt upright.

"Did you see Watkins?" he asked.

"No!"

"Left injector won't work," said Paddy tersely. "I sent him for some one to fix it. He might not be back for five or ten minutes. Haven't you got another engine and crew who can go?"

"No! The others have gone on home. And this is the only engine ready. I can't get another crew to the station in less than a half-hour, or an hour. That will be time enough to take your train out. But you'll have to take McGann at once."

Paddy's jaw set.

"It would be a good thing for the skunk to sit there in the station an' sweat blood fer awhile," he snapped. "He needs something like that! I'll bet he wouldn't care a great deal. He's too much in love with himself!"

Bracket clutched Paddy's fat shoulder.

"You wouldn't do a thing like that, would you?" he asked in unbelief. "It's McGann's wife that's dying. Not McGann!"

Paddy gave vent to his feelings by slamming the brake handle into emergency, and then back to release. When the hiss of air had ceased he got to his feet.

"I'll do what I please! What about No. 17?" he growled, squinting up at the steam gauge and then opening the fire door and studying the fire.

"I'll get a crew for her! Just so you haul McGann. I don't think you can make it by eleven anyhow."

"Shut up!" snapped Paddy, reaching around for a rake. "I'll make it by ten if I want to. Go back and get Watkins. I'll go off an' leave him if he isn't here right away."

Bracket swung down and raced off into the darkness without further words.

Paddy raked the fire down swiftly and turned the blower on full. Then went back to his seat, made sure the cylinder cocks were open, and cracked the throttle, so the steam would clear the accumulated water out of the cylinders. To help it along he threw the reverse forward, allowing the engine to creep at a snail's pace down the track.

He had gone some fifty yards, and backed up, when Watkins swung into the cab.

"All set?" Paddy called.

Watkins, panting, nodded.

Paddy threw the reverse forward again and eased out on the throttle. The right cylinder cock roared as the steam rushed through. The great steel steed hesitated, moved slowly, then faster. They slipped down the yards, flaring jets of steam spurting from one cylinder, then the other.

"What about the injector?" Watkins asked, peering at the water bottle.

"Divil a bit can we worry about the injector! We'll have no heavy train to pull. The one good one will do us!"

Watkins gave the fire a hasty feeding of coal. Then leaned out his side of the cab to keep an eye on the yard lights.

Sky City was a hundred and forty-six miles away, in the opposite direction from Petersburg. The engine was headed the wrong way. Before they left the yards Paddy switched to a Y track and turned around.

Then, with everything straightened out, he turned the bell ringer on and backed for the station at a reckless speed.

They came up out of the night with the bell tolling loudly, the squat stack streaming sparks from the urge of the roaring blower, and Watkins bathed in fiery light as he raked the leaping fire.

The great train-shed was empty, save for scattered Pullmans and several strings of vacant coaches. As Paddy shut off steam and coasted in with his hand on the brake, two men ran out from the gates and cut across to intercept them.

One was McGann. The other a tall gentleman with a close-cropped mustache and a small leather case swinging from one hand.

Paddy applied the air and stopped by them. McGann clambered up first.

"What's the matter?" he demanded loudly. "I said to get this engine here in ten minutes! It's nearer fifteen!"

"There was nothing ready," Paddy told him with a shrug. "I left No. 17 to her fate an' come on."

McGann, his eyes adjusted to the light in the cab, looked at him closely.

"It's you, is it?" he rasped.

"Yes, sor," acknowledged Paddy briefly. "Would you be wantin' me to go back?"

"You'll have to do! Get us to Sky City as quick as you can! Eleven is the dead line! I've cleared the road!"

Paddy settled firmer in his seat and peered out the window. The signal at the end of the train shed shone green. The way was clear. One hundred and forty-six miles of track ahead. A woman dying. The minutes fleeting.

Paddy's fat face settled in lines of seriousness. His hand pushed the air reverse forward. Then released the brakes. He cracked the throttle.

THEY moved. Ran through the train-shed with increasing speed. Outside, the dark night closed in about them. Paddy reached up and snapped the headlight button. Down the rails ahead the dazzling white beam leaped.

Out on the throttle again. The great drivers turned faster. The warehouses and buildings along the tracks began to slip by with increasing speed.

McGann and the surgeon seated themselves on Watkins' seat.

"Open her up!" McGann shouted across the width of the cab.

Paddy gave him no heed. Sat his seat like a fat statue, his head and shoulders out of the window, his hand steady on the throttle.

In a moment he eased it out a trifle further.

Then, as they left the interlocking switches behind and the track stretched straight and free, he gave a tug. The squat stack suddenly bellowed as the exhaust swept up through it. The huge locomotive surged forward eagerly.

Paddy pulled his head inside for a moment. Looked at the water-glass, and opened the injector. Then pushed out of the window again and glued his eyes to the parallel rails that slipped smoothly up the gleaming path of light to meet them.

The houses lining the right of way grew more scattered. Rushed by faster. Paddy reached for the whistle cord and shattered the night with a wild blast. Thirty seconds later they pounded over a grade crossing, where automobile headlights winked at them for a brief instant.

Paddy pulled back on the air reverse a bit. The bellowing exhaust changed to a smoother, more even flow. But the drivers turned faster.

Watkins fitted the shaker bar in place. Pushed in, pulled out, with stout lunges of his body. His face was beginning to glisten with perspiration. But his efforts were telling. The needle of the steam gauge was gradually creeping around toward the mark of full pressure.

The last house! The last light flitted by. They were in the cool, open country. The powerful headlight cut a gleaming tunnel through the black night. Down it they rushed. Faster! And still faster!

The great locomotive began to plunge and sway. The surgeon and McGann were thrown back and forth on their seat. One lunge caused McGann to brush his hand against the hot blower valve. He jerked it away with a curse.

The surgeon was enjoying himself. He held his hat in his hand and peered out the window, drinking in deep drafts of the cool air which sang past.

A woman dying. Her life in the hollow of Paddy Reese's hand. If he willed it she died. If he brought the great surgeon to her side she had a chance.

Paddy, the fat, the gay, and by McGann's word, the coward, pulled out on the throttle until it would come no more. Fitted his goggles down over his eyes, and crouched on his seat, straining his eyes far ahead.

The ponderous driving rods began to pound. The song of the straining machinery rose higher, louder. The cab surged from side to side more violently. The apron of the tank began to beat a fantastic tattoo upon the cab sill.

More speed!

The exhaust pulled the fire until the flames leaped to the base of the stack. When Watkins raked the seething fire-bed the sparks burst through the stack and trailed in a fiery plume behind them.

The steam-gauge needle quivered and crept around. And with the added pressure their speed went up.

Both the surgeon and McGann were forced to brace themselves against the wild sways and plunges of the cab.

Faster! Minutes no longer marked the passage of the mile-posts. The telegraph poles took on the appearance of a picket fence as they flashed by. The dark trees and bushes behind them turned into a solid somber wall which flowed and flowed endlessly.

Their world was the ribbon of track. It unwound smoothly. Straight stretches down which they swooped with dizzying speed. Curves, around which they slued with breath-taking lunges. Hills, where Paddy gave her more valve, the exhaust deepened, and up which they snarled with little decrease in speed.

The tons of iron and steel which had drowsed so silently on the Santee ready lot a short time before were changed into a raging, thundering monster which vomited fire and devoured the miles with an insatiable appetite.

Little hamlets, oases of twinkling light in the vast barren night, loomed ahead every few minutes. Paddy bore down on the whistle cord. They thundered up, shrieking warning blasts. There would be a flash of lights, a crossing with staring people. Then abruptly the dark country once more.

Watkins fed the white-hot maw of the fire carefully. Now and then shook it down and evened the bed up with the rake. And his skill sent the needle around until the safety popped with a roar of escaping steam.

Paddy looked in and nodded approvingly at the sound. And Watkins wiped the sweat from his face and grinned at him.

Back on the air reverse to the last possible notch. And their speed still increased. It became a thing to shrink from. The locomotive bucked and plunged. Each curve threatened to be the last. To send them off into the fields in a shattering mass of wreckage.

The surgeon looked apprehensively across the cab to Paddy, crouching motionless. The outline of the calm, fat figure reassured him and he shouted in McGann's ear—

"Looks as though we'll make it in time!"

McGann glanced at his watch and nodded curtly.

The hundred and forty-six miles became a hundred. And shrank faster than the minutes. They were running in the upper levels of speed. Far above the scheduled time of the Hill and Plain Express, the fastest train on the whole D. & R. system. Far above the safety limits of the road.

A glow rounded a curve far ahead. Turned into another headlight. Paddy dimmed his. The other faded also. And they flashed by a light-spangled passenger train.

Paddy suddenly thrust the throttle in and checked their speed slightly. He shouted above the din of their progress:

"Trough ahead! Stand by the valve!"

Watkins moved to the scoop valve, located on the side of the tank. And, when Paddy raised his gauntleted left hand, he opened the valve.

Down under the tank the lip of the scoop lifted tons of water from the long shallow trough. And their speed flung it up into the tank with such violence that it burst out of the top opening in sheets.

Again Paddy raised his hand. Watkins closed the valve, and the scoop lifted. This time Watkins took a lantern and climbed over the top of the coal to the back of the rocking-tank, and made sure the tank had filled.

It had. Paddy again pulled out on the throttle and they took up their mad flight through the night.

The minutes passed. The miles unrolled. The grade began to rise slightly. Sky City lay up in the hills. For miles the track would mount. And at last rear up in a steep grade called Boulder Mountain. Then dip for three miles right into the Sky City station.

McGann took out a black cigar and began to chew restlessly on it. Watkins toiled with the fire. Paddy nursed the throttle, kept his attention on the swift-changing right of way.

They drew near the hills. Entered the last leg of their wild trip. There was time to spare. The odds slowly shifted in favor of the dying woman.

And then Paddy, pulling out on the injector handle, suddenly lurched back in his seat. The handle of the injector swung loose.

PADDY leaned over, pushed it in, pulled it out rapidly. His face suddenly became grave.

McGann saw his actions. Got to his feet and lurched across the swaying cab.

"What's the matter?" he demanded loudly.

"Starting valve handle broke or disconnected inside," Paddy replied.

McGann was no mechanic. He asked—

"What will that do?"

Paddy gave him a long look.

"It means," he answered, "that I can't put any more water in the boiler."

McGann stared stupidly.

"No water!"

"Not a drop, sor! The other injector was broke when you phoned the roundhouse. There wasn't time to get it fixed."

McGann gestured with his unlighted cigar.

"You mean you are broke down?"

"Just about," Paddy answered, and leaned out to peer ahead.

McGann's face suddenly twisted with rage.

"—— you!" he shouted. "I'll bet this is a put up job! You want to get back at me! But if we don't get in Sky City by eleven your job won't be worth two cents!"

Paddy turned back toward him. His goggled face was expressionless. He took a deep breath. Then spoke coldly:

"You'll be in Sky City by eleven o'clock—or in ——, sor! Better say a prayer!"

"What do you mean?"

Paddy pointed a gauntleted hand toward the partly filled water-glass. His voice was solemn, almost menacing.

"There's our water! I'm going to run her till she makes Sky City—or blows up! If we make the top of Boulder Mountain we can coast in. If the water don't last that far—they'll scrape us up in the morning!

And the water's low, sor! The water's low already!"

He turned away, leaned out the window.

McGann peered up at the little water bottle. At the surging line of water outlined in the water bottle light.

He swallowed. Looked again at Paddy. Then at the water bottle. Finally stood rigid and riveted his gaze on the water which meant life or death for his wife.

Not a notch did Paddy push the throttle in. Not a mile slower did their speed become. They thundered up the mounting grade and the echoes of their passage rolled far over the silent country side.

The water oozed lower in the glass.

McGann, jaws set tight, watched it raptly.

The surgeon, ignorant of the trick fate had played them, looked calmly out of the window.

Watkins opened the fire door, that the steam might come down a few pounds and not pop off. They needed the last drop of water.

Up they climbed. The grade became steeper. Paddy had to give her more valve. That took more steam. The water sank and sank.

Paddy did not bother to look at the glass. No good now.

The water reached the bottom of the glass. For a minute or so it rose to view in little surges. Then even they had not the power to bring it in sight.

McGann looked at Paddy. Saw only the back of his head. Then turned again to the empty water-glass.

He knew the fate that was swiftly approaching them. Not long before, a freight engine had blown up because of low water. The fireman and engineer were torn to bits. A brakeman on the second car back was killed.

McGann had inspected the remains. The sight was still fresh in his mind.

The seconds flew. Inside the boiler the water was sinking lower and lower. How low could not be told. Watkins tried the gauge cocks. The bottom one spouted dry steam.

That bottom cock was the danger line. They were slipping inside the jaws of death.

A cold sweat began to bead McGann's forehead. His hand worked at the unlighted cigar until it shredded into bits. He darted irresolute glances at the broad, emotionless back of Paddy Reese.

Paddy gave him no attention. His eyes were riveted on the rapidly mounting track ahead.

The shadow of approaching death hung over the dim cab. Watkins' face was pale. But he was loyal to Paddy's judgment. He said nothing.

Inside the boiler the water was dropping. Nearing the crown plates. Soon they would be exposed. The white-hot fire would heat them red. Warp them. Weaken them. Suddenly the steam pressure would burst its bonds. Rend the mighty engine into bits. Wipe them all from the face of the earth in one awful, burning, scalding second.

The sweat on McGann's forehead grew thicker. He wiped it away and his hand trembled.

The surgeon, knowing nothing, looked out of his window calmly.

The minutes ticked away. They were laboring up the long side of Boulder Mountain. Paddy had the valve gear wider. They were using more and more steam.

And inside the boiler the water was dropping, dropping, at an unknown rate. That was the terrible thing. It was a creeping death, with its arrival screened by inch-thick steel. No notice. Just a sudden rending of its bonds in a spewing torrent of fire and steam.

McGann's face was haggard.

He asked hoarsely—

"How much farther have we got to go?"

The brooding figure on the seat did not move.

"I said," repeated McGann louder, "how much farther have we got to go?"

Slowly Paddy faced him.

"'Tis prayin' ye'd better be, instead o' shouting," he said grimly.

McGann shivered involuntarily. And Paddy turned back, leaving him with his thoughts.

McGann wiped his forehead again. His hand trembled. He looked at the boiler fearfully. Suddenly his voice came, almost a croak.

"I—I think you'd better stop!"

Paddy gave him no reply.

McGann placed his shaking hand on Paddy's shoulder. Repeated—

"Stop the engine!"

Paddy wheeled suddenly and looked at him. His glance, through the goggles, was menacing.

"Would ye let your wife die, because your skin is in danger?"

McGann swallowed. His throat was dry. He had difficulty in speaking. His arrogance had disappeared.

"There are four of us," he said weakly.

Paddy told him remorselessly: "You are a man who does what you set out to do. You started to save your wife's life!"

McGann looked at the empty water-glass. At the dirty front of the steam-filled boiler. Any second it might erupt in a terrible blast. The fear that had been working on him swept up in a rising tide.

"Stop the engine!" he croaked.

Paddy smiled for the first time.

"In Sky City," he replied briefly, and presented his back.

McGann was shaking. Completely controlled by the fear which had been rasping at his nerves since the water started its downward journey in the glass.

He looked irresolutely at the landscape which was flashing by. Then at Paddy's broad back. And at the menacing front of the boiler. Any second it might burst out at him.

His lips wabbled loosely. His face was pale. Suddenly he lunged against the throttle, shutting off the steam. And with the same motion threw the brake handle over.

The brakes went down. The huge driver wheels locked. Showering sparks they slid along. The mad pace dropped rapidly.

"—— you!" Paddy swore, as he threw the brake handle into release. "You yellow houn'!" He pulled the throttle out. They picked up speed once more. "You fool!" Paddy snarled at McGann. "We're only a quarter of a mile from the top!"

A few seconds later the laboring exhaust softened. Paddy threw the throttle in and called to Watkins:

"Draw your fire quick, laddie! We can roll in now!" And he stripped off his cap and goggles and lighted a cigaret.

With the smoke drifting slowly from his nostrils, Paddy looked steadily into McGann's eyes. And McGann, who had regained control of himself when he heard they were safe, met the look. A flush rose and mantled his features. A fiery flush of shame. He dropped his eyes and swallowed.

The surgeon, who had been startled into attention when the brakes went down, rose to his feet and called across the toiling form of Watkins—

"What was the matter back there, McGann?"

Paddy, the fat, the gay once more, answered for McGann.

"The super had a touch o' fever," he called back lightly. "Just a wee touch—o' yellow fever. But he's over it. An' a better man he'll be for it, I'm thinkin'!"

And McGann swallowed again—and let the remark stand.

EAST of the BISHOP

Fine Yachts and Treacherous Rocks

By

Richard Howells Watkins

DO YOU know the Scillies? Forty islets and a thousand rocks; a paradise for gardeners and a hell for seamen; islands abloom with flowers the year around; seas sown thickly with the devil's granite teeth.

Ask a liner captain when he's in jovial mood, come down from the bridge on a smooth and sunlit day, to chat with passengers. Ten to one he'll stop laughing in a hurry, put on a poker face, and tell you soberly enough that the Scilly Isles are a group lying in the Atlantic twenty-eight miles southwest of Land's End, England.

He may inform you, if you're the sort of person a liner captain must be friendly with, that just to the westward of them stands the Bishop, a lighthouse crowning the first bit of rock your eyes will light on since Fire Island beach faded out astern.

"We make our landfall on the Bishop, and you'll see the Scillies on the port side soon after," he may say.

But he will not add that if fog blankets the Bishop and the explosive signal deceives, a chunk of the Isles may be the last thing you ever will see. That has happened before.

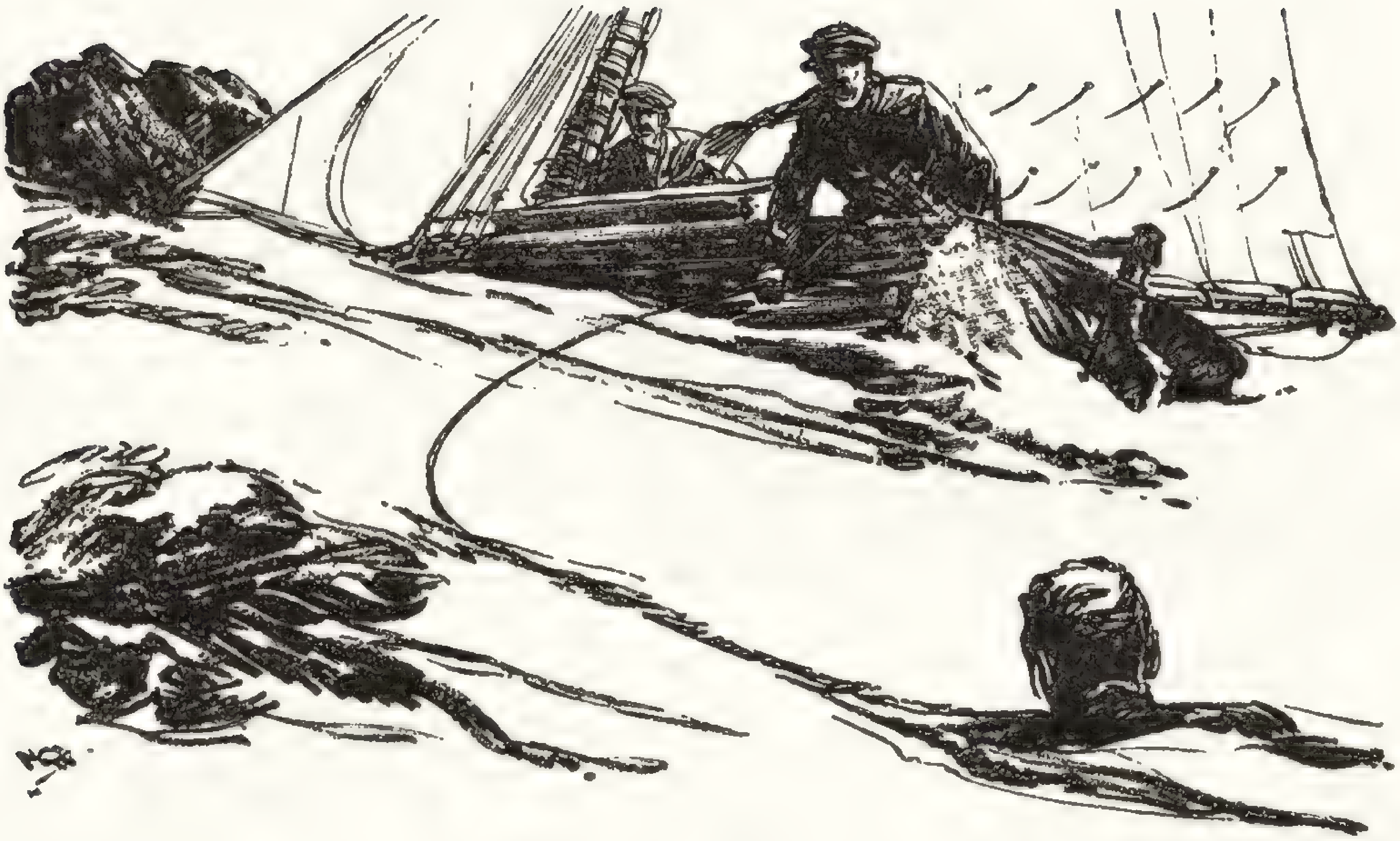
They're bad to liner captains, the Scilly Isles are, as they've been bad to seamen since Phœnician captains, questing for Cornish tin, felt their teeth. But they are worse to their own fishermen, are these Scillies. One of the proverbs of the Isles, sunk deep in antiquity, is that for every Scillonian that dies a natural death the sea takes nine.

But the Isles are fair, and the breezes are wondrous balmy—usually. Besides, a man will love the place where he spends his youth, and so the Scilly Isles have their two thousand souls, though there are more widows among them than there are in other ports of the kingdom of Great Britain.

Into the harbor of St. Mary's—largest of these Isles—there sailed, one breezy September day, two small, trim craft; twenty-five-footers at most, whose white paintwork, varnished spars and spotless sails set them apart from the sober, sturdy, unkempt fishing craft swinging to their moorings off the single pier. Yachts are not seen so often in the Scilly roadstead as they are in the Solent or the Thames, and for many a good reason hidden beneath the beautiful blue and green waters.

One of the visiting craft was a cutter; the other a yawl. Each carried the owner and a seaman. Though they sailed in company, there was no greeting between the two yachtsmen when they climbed the stone steps of the landing and stood on the pier together, looking about them with the curious eyes of newcomers.

The master of the yawl, Jasper Miller, was a tall and rather thin young man, with a burn on his fair-skinned countenance that



some sun stronger than England's had given him. A bit more flesh on his sharp nose, cheekbones, and chin, and a few less wrinkles on his forehead would have made him good-looking.

The other man, Sir Ansel Hornton, was somewhat shorter, and even fairer than his companion. His head was covered rather thinly by very blond hair, and his small mustache, carefully waxed, was quite as light. The most vivid feature of his regular face was the pair of light blue eyes now fixed with some intensity upon Miller.

"Now that we're here," said Miller bruskly, "I presume we had better get our local information about the course from some fisherman."

"We can not get on with it too soon for me," replied Sir Ansel.

For an instant they stared at one another, tight-lipped, and with cold, steady eyes. No man, seeing them then, could think them anything but deadly enemies.

Then Miller turned, and beckoned imperatively to an idler who had come to gape at the two white yachts, so foreign to that gray harbor.

"We want to talk to a man who knows the Western Rocks thoroughly," Miller said curtly.

The man stared, and then laughed.

"There ban't any man knows un well, sir, but Rob Trevellick there—" he nodded toward a short, strong muscled fisherman who was setting his boat to rights at its mooring—" 'e's fished an' lobstered 'mong un nigh a score o' years, an' knows un better'n most. 'E takes fishing parties out when the weather's settled."

"Hail him, will you?" Miller requested, and handed the man a shilling.

The man looked at it, murmured, "Thank 'ee, sir," and pocketed it with unhurried deliberation.

"Rob, ho!" he shouted. "Come ashore! Furriners want 'ee!"

The man in the boat looked up, nodded, and after making fast a tyer around his mainsail, dropped into his dinghy and sculled to the steps with easy, powerful oars. Though credited with twenty years among the rocks he was not far beyond thirty. His countenance was keenly intelligent and frankly interested in these seamen from another world.

Miller glanced at Sir Ansel.

"Will you speak to him?" he requested stiffly.

Sir Ansel did not give the fisherman time to scrutinize them before he spoke bruskly:

"We understand you are familiar with the Western Rocks. We are here—on a wager—" he smiled mirthlessly at his scowling companion—"to sail a course around the Rocks. We do not require pilots, for each of us is handling his boat alone, but we want sailing instructions, information about the set of the tides, rocks not shown on the charts, and so forth. We start tomorrow morning."

"You will be well paid," added Miller, as Rob Trevellick hesitated, his eyes wandering from one to the other in a searching but bewildering scrutiny.

"Well?" exclaimed Sir Ansel, as the fisherman remained silent.

"Here's my advice," said Trevellick. "The Rocks ha' a bad enough brand as 'tis wi'out gentlemen from up-along comin' down to spear their boats on un and drown 'emselves. Fishin' parties are terrible scarce now for the name o' the Rocks. Don't 'ee try it."

Miller laughed sharply.

"A fine business man! You're afraid we'll kill ourselves on the Rocks and hurt your trade. How much balm do you require in advance for our damage to your tripper traffic? We're quite willing to pay high for the privilege of settling our—little wager."

"Don't 'ee try it," repeated the fisherman earnestly, showing no resentment at this ridicule.

"We're here to settle something," said Sir Ansel grimly. "You needn't endeavor to dissuade us."

Rob Trevellick shook his head.

"I'll ha' no hand in't. There's bad feelings atween 'ee. A blind man could see that. 'Tis no wager—'tis a blood fight. Sail back to Cornwall while 'ee may an' be thankful the Rocks did not take 'ee both."

This blunt accusation, and the keen discernment behind it, staggered Miller. He stood silent, staring at the fisherman.

"Nonsense!" said Ansel, hastily. "We are sportsmen, but we like a bit of danger with our sport."

"Keep away from the Rocks," warned Rob Trevellick.

He flung his hand to westward in a solemn gesture.

"They'll grind 'ee as they've ground better men afore."

He turned his back on them and on the yellow sunset that glared in the westward and walked soberly toward his tiny whitewashed stone cottage.

That night, before his peat fire, keeping one eye on the quick hands of his nine-year-old boy as they worked on a long splice, Rob Trevellick drew on his pipe and marveled over the foolishness or hate that had brought two men to sail among the Western Rocks. It was very hard for him to understand any man's venturing without need into the graveyard of the Scillies, waters that few Scillonians visited, even when the ocean infrequently quieted to a mere lazy swell.

Here there were no islands—simply granite masses protruding from the sea, or lurking beneath the surface. In the best of weather swift tides, crazed by the maze of obstacles, swirled among the piles and ledges, and contended with the never-ceasing roll of the waves. In the worst of weather—but no man has ever been among the rocks in the worst of weather and returned to tell what he saw.

In this waste of white water and hidden pinnacles of granite, pollack, cod, skate, mackerel, conger eel and lobster flourished and grew to a size unknown in the roadstead or among the larger islands. And here, too, on the calmest of summer days, Rob and the few other daring Scillonians who knew the rocks, or hoped that they did, brought venturesome visitors fishing or to view the seals at a pound a day. On the Isles there was no other way that a man like Rob Trevellick might earn such a sum of money as that—a pound for a single day's work!

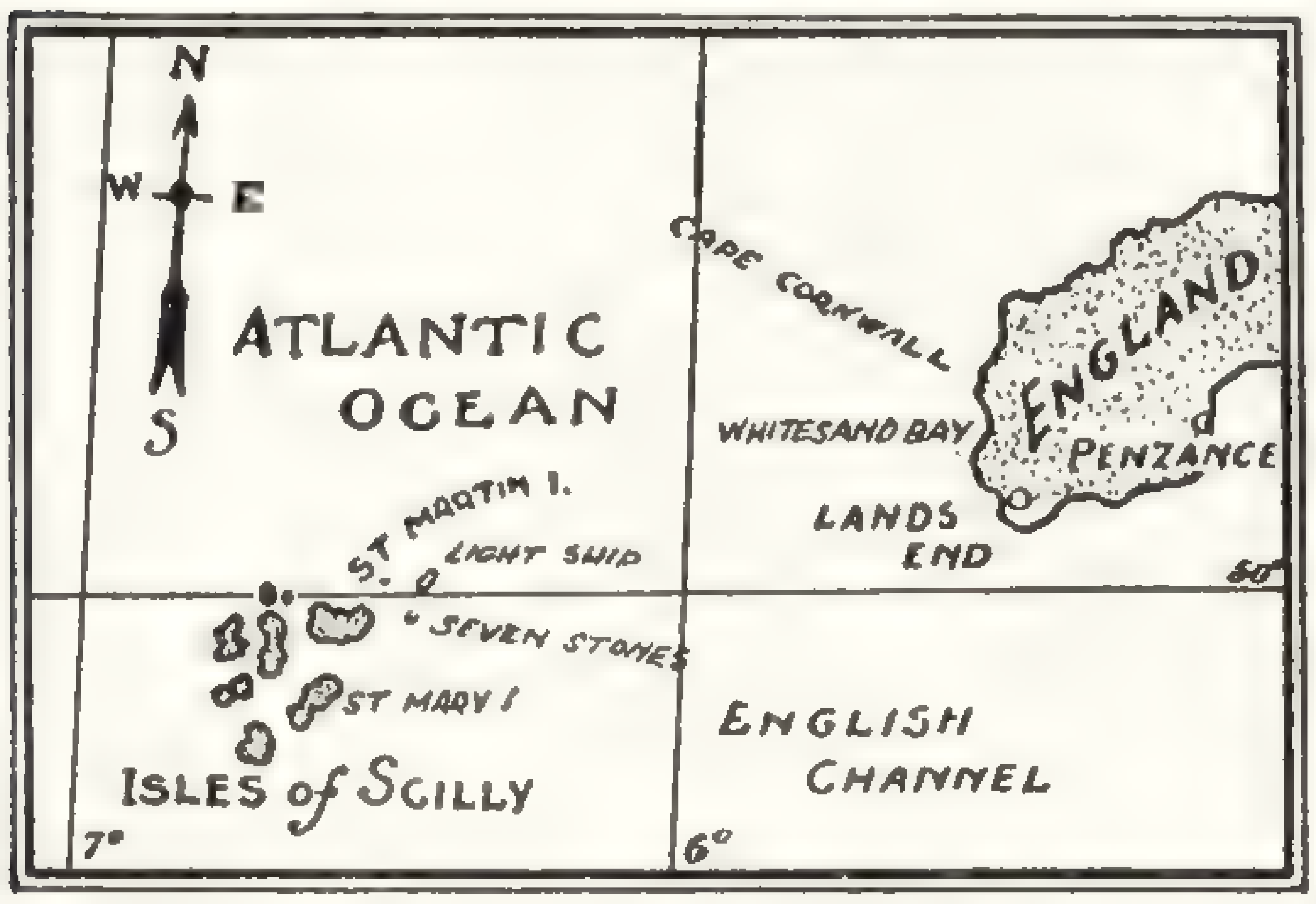
But it was not greed that sent Rob among the rocks, or even dire necessity. It was ambition. And this same unrealized ambition now had stirred in the breasts of three generations of his family.

Rob took his pipe out of his mouth and looked downward at the boy so absorbed in demonstrating the cunning of his fingers on the bit of rope. A likely lad; alert in mind as well as in hand, and a bold boy, too. Certainly it was worth risking the Western Rocks in all but the worst of weathers to forward, through this youngster, the cause that had animated his father and his father's father before him.

The striving of the family had begun when his grandfather, Yankee mate of the Newburyport clipper *Starry Banner*, came ashore on the fore royal yard, one morning when the ocean raged. The ship and the others of the ship's company went down on the Gilstone. The vessel had been lost during his watch, though not by his neglect, so the New Englander philosophically married a Scillonian girl and spent the rest of his life as a fisherman.

But though he cut himself off so absolutely from his people and his profession, he cherished the hope that his son would one day command an American ship as fine as the one that the Gilstone had taken.

Rob sighed, and moved a trifle uneasily in his chair as he came to this part of the story that had been handed down to him. The father, and the son for whom he had planned so hopefully, were drowned together between Annet and St. Agnes one calm day when it seemed impossible that the sea could do harm.



The dream lived on, however, in a daughter of the house, the mother of Rob Trevellick. When Gunner's Ledge claimed her husband, the dream faded dim indeed, and Rob, with the same philosophy that his grandfather had possessed, put his own prospects out of mind to devote himself to supporting his mother and her younger children as a fisherman.

Now that the dream was becoming more vivid once more, Rob's daring among the Rocks and the occasional windfall of a pound for a day's work was slowly, very slowly, increasing a fund that might some time be large enough to send young Luke to the mainland and later put him aboard a merchant ship as an apprentice—with a future on the Seven Seas.

Ships had changed since his grandfather had dreamed his dream. Luke would pace athwart ship on a bridge, instead of fore and aft on a quarterdeck, but the sea was the same sea, and an officer was still an officer. Often when hauling his pots alone among the rocks, or answering the innumerable questions of amateur fishermen, Rob Trevellick would see the big ships passing to the southward; mighty four-stackers racing for Cherbourg, twenty-thousand-tonners outward bound at a more leisurely pace; tramps loaded down to their Plimsolls plodding the salt highway with the products of the Empire under their hatches. Would Luke set foot on one of these very ships?

The thought would set him hauling more stoutly on the heavy lobster pot, or devoting himself more keenly to sailing his broad-beamed yawl over the hidden ledges where pollack and mackerel lurked.

The number of daring visitors who desired to cruise among the Western Rocks was very few, and they must be given the best of sport and the most painstaking seamanship to please and protect them. Otherwise they might not come again, and young Luke would lose thereby.

Rob sighed and knocked out his pipe. It was slow, deadly slow. Luke was growing like a willow sapling, and the fund went up only sixpence by sixpence. No amount of sacrifice by Rob and his wife seemed to make it grow faster. And with fools coming to Scilly to fling their boats and their bodies on the Rocks, it might well become even slower. Few men will pay a pound a day to put their bodies in jeopardy with only a few fish to be gained thereby.

And then, too, occasionally among the Rocks, without a moment's warning, would come a close call, a very breath of Death, to remind him that so far, in this long struggle, the sea had always won, and the fishermen had always died.

He stooped and took the joined ropes from his son's hand.

"Fair, lad," he said, squinting critically at the smooth splice. "But get 'ee to bed 'fore your mother talks to 'ee."

THE dawn next day was a red dawn as full of promise of wind and rough waters as the yellow sunset of the night before. Rob was up and on board the *Banner*, his broad-beamed, slow-moving boat, earlier than usual, bent on visiting as many of his lobster pots among the Western Rocks as the rising sea would permit.

It was a dead beat to windward down the Broad Sound toward the towering Bishop on its outlying rock, but that meant a quick run home, so Rob did not grumble. But the strengthening sou'wester was more than he had bargained for, as he found when he got to windward of that ragged, broken barrier of granite that is the backbone of the Rocks.

The Crebawethens, Jacky's Rock, Rosevear, Rosevean, Pednathise Head—all jagged bones in that destroying barrier—were taking powerful green seas over their black sides and threshing them into white foam and flying spray. The dull shock of blows of water on rock, and then the rumble of the broken, repulsed water, came over the cresting seas with awful plainness to Rob, though he was well to windward of them. These were no ships, to reel and shudder before the blows of the Atlantic; these Rocks and the Scillies behind them were the advance guard of the sturdy English isle, and it was the waves that must give and break, not the unflinching rocks.

Rob glanced uneasily at his straining mast, and the patched canvas of the mainsail stiff as the planking of the bottom. Sturdy the spar was, but old, and though longitudinal cracks are nothing to give thought to in a good mast, the cracks in the *Banner's* were deeper than Rob liked to see them, and the forestays and shrouds had more slack in them than he had thought. Luffing cautiously at every puff, he came alongside a string of pots.

The thunder of the old mainsail as the wind seized it when the boat hove to alongside the string warned him that more loss than profit threatened that day. After he had hauled a few pots, he gave up reluctantly and let the old *Banner* run before the wind back up the Broad Sound.

She yawed threateningly as the wind filled her mainsail, but Rob's quick hand on the tiller balked every hint of a broach-to or gybe, and the broad stern rode the following waves that rushed up to her, intent on breaking over the counter.

As he looked ahead up the Sound, past the isles of Annet and St. Agnes toward the roadstead of St. Mary's, his keen eyes subdenly contracted. There, just off Annet Head, storming along on the port tack, were the cutter and the yawl that had come to the Scillies the previous day. Sir Ansel and his "friend" Miller were settling their little wager.

"Ah, the fools!" exclaimed Rob Trevellick, squinting intently at the two trim craft that slipped through the seas, seemingly without displacing them.

It was a pretty sight they presented, but not to Rob Trevellick. The cutter was carrying only two sails, a double-reefed mainsail and her jib, while the yawl had three: jib, single-reefed mainsail and mizzen.

"A double reef's no cure for rocks," Rob muttered as he watched the two cut the water. Their course was taking them into no danger at the moment, and if they followed their chart down the Broad Sound, with a care for the Gunner's and Crim Rocks, they would have a beam wind to sail outside the Bishop and far to westward of the Westerns. The tide was setting strong into the Sound from the northwest, but the boats were so fast they need not fear its menace.

His own boat was rolling toward them before the wind at a pace that cut down the distance swiftly. He prepared to give them room and to spare since they were close-hauled and had the right of way. Now he could see that each boat carried only the owner, crouched beside the helm. He would soon pass astern of them.

Then, suddenly, Rob saw Sir Ansel, in the cutter. look to leeward, stand up for a moment, and look again. What he saw was the flurry of foam that danced above the Old Wreck Ledge.

"'Tis well to leeward, man; that white water'll not hurt 'ee," Rob murmured, frowning. "Hold your course, man, there's—"

He stopped, and the blood in his veins seemed to cease its flow, too. For Sir Ansel, apparently seeing more perils in the innocent whitecaps between him and the ledge, had pushed hard on his tiller; the cutter's head was coming around. Her sails were filling on the starboard tack.

"Go about!" shouted Rob, though he knew his voice could not carry that distance.

Sir Ansel, after his impulsive move, glanced around to look over the possibilities of his new tack, and his startled eyes instantly brought him the realization that Annet, and the rounded heads of the Haycocks, off her head, were uncomfortably close aboard. The silent, strong tide had done that to him. Uncertainly he swung his tiller again, and the cutter, which had not yet gathered full way, hung in stays for a moment and drifted. Sir Ansel desperately attempted to retrieve his error by bringing her back on the same tack to gather more speed for the maneuver. It was a futile effort. The cutter slowly forged on, but the tide, cutting across her course, bore her nearer and nearer to the island of rock.

Rob Trevellick groaned. He could not take his eyes off the cutter, which now was sailing as close to the wind as a boat could get. Her bow was pointed away from danger, but her progress was infinitesimal, and just a point or so off her port bow raged white water, warning of a shoulder of the headland just beneath the surface. It was quite plain to Rob that she was bound for destruction, for beyond that headland, well away from the island itself, was a waste of huge boulders, standing up in the sea. And Sir Ansel could not tack, he had no speed to swing his cutter's head around. The trim white yacht crept on, clearing the headlands, and Sir Ansel looked up—to see new dangers in his path.

Reluctantly Rob's hand moved his tiller. He swung the *Banner* from her safe course in the Broad Sound and bore toward Annet. He felt no exhilaration of danger; his heart was lead heavy in his chest. Well he knew what happened to men who challenged the power and spite of the Rocks in a gale like this. His eyes, beneath half-closed lids, studied the swells ahead of him. The cutter was just on the edge of the rocks off Annet. There was clear water ahead until there. The boom of the mainsail was over to port, and the *Banner* was flying head on toward the cutter. As he came closer he caught a glimpse of the cutter's helmsman gripping the tiller tightly, staring with fascinated eyes at the rocks just to leeward. The boat was practically on them now.

Gripping the tiller with his right hand, Rob curved his left about his mouth, and hailed lustily.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" he roared, all the power of his seaman's voice rushing out of his throat.

Against that feeble human cry was the roar of water cascading over an iron coast, but either the hail reached Sir Ansel or the loom of the *Banner's* sail aroused him. He looked up, to see the fishing boat rushing head on toward him, with Rob standing in the stern, waving him to jump.

The impulsive, heedless streak that had gotten Sir Ansel into his difficulties now served him well. The cutter's bow rose high on a white-topped surge that knocked it sideways toward the rocks. The crash of the impact seemed to fill Sir Ansel's ears and jar his flinching body, even before it came. He sprang to the edge of the counter, and balanced there, somehow, as his boat crashed down in the first of the blows that were to beat her bottom out. The *Banner's* bow surged by. He leaped from his unstable place and tumbled headlong into the big cockpit of the fisherman's boat.

"Stand by to gybe!" shouted Rob instantly, and swung his tiller over.

The bow of the flying *Banner* reeled to port, swerving from the menacing shoulder of Annet that seemed thrusting out like a sword to pierce the oncoming boat.

Rob, standing with the tiller gripped between his legs, hauled in on the mainsheet with hand leaping over hand, but the turning boat was quicker than he. The wind, catching in the other side of the huge mainsail as the *Banner* swung around, snapped the sail across the boat with the swiftness of a cracking whip. There was a sudden crash, and the boom of the mainsail splintered from end to end.

Rob Trevellick raised his head and appraised the damage with grim, swift eyes, the while his hand set the *Banner* on a course that would take him inside the Old Wreck Ledge. An overwhelming relief swept over him. The sea had failed again.

"I cheated 'em," he shouted and laughed aloud. "Cheated the Rocks an' a split in a spar all the harm they could do I! Beat 'em for once!"

The boom, although split, was not broken; the mast was weakened, to be sure, but still in its step.

"You're lucky, I tell 'ee, man," he assured the white-faced Sir Ansel.

He nodded astern. The cutter, ground by the rocks, was on her side; and white water surged through her bottom and out of the cockpit. Her mast drifted with the tide, and tugged at the wreck, as if trying to drag it farther into that bed of jagged destruction.

Rob wasted only a glance at the splintered wreck; then turned to look for Miller. And his strong red hand went weak on the tiller, and he groaned aloud. He had laughed at the Rocks too soon.

Miller in the yawl was in trouble—so much trouble that he had not noticed his rival's plight. Apparently the course the two men had laid out on the chart for their race was not out to the Bishop, but through the plainly marked channel of Gorregan Neck. He had ventured into that great semicircle of shallow, tumultuous water formed by the main chain of the Western Rocks on the one side, and by Annet, the Hellweathers, and divers small islands and rocks—such as the one that had claimed the cutter—on the other. The half circle is broken in the middle by several small channels, of which Gorregan Neck is the largest.

All this was perfectly plain on the chart, but what met Miller's gaze was a phantasmagoria of churning white water and rocks that seemed to leap out of the sea, frolic upon it for an instant in fiendish glee, and then disappear to lie in wait for venturesome keels. Through the Western Rocks, that Rob had viewed from the outside that day, the gale was hurling the green waters of the Atlantic. Seen from this side, the scene was utterly different. Now the Crebawethans, Jacky's Rock, Rosevear, Rosevean, Pednathise Head, all seemed inadequate to their task of repelling the sea. For here, to leeward of them it could be seen that the granite barrier split and threshed the crashing waves into a nightmare of thundering white foam, but it could not prevent solid masses of water from charging through the openings between the various rocks. They stood like a wall that had been breached at a dozen places by the assaults of a persistent, unconquerable foe. And into the semicircle cauldron of crazy waters, through the wide opening at the top, rushed the tide, setting across the rushing streams and bending them into unbelievable gyrations.

Into this wild area Miller, trusting in deep water shown plainly by the chart, had raced bound for Gorregan Neck. He was in a worse plight than had confronted Sir Ansel. Amid the bewildering currents, the boiling sea, and the winds that whistled over the Rocks, he was struggling to steer a course—any course—that would leave main and mizzenmasts in his boat and give her enough way against the sucking tide to avoid the ledges and granite masses that stuck out of the sea like hard, giant fists.

He had no time now to consult chart and compass, for malicious currents whirled his yawl about, making sport of his rudder's most positive attempts at control. Waves pounded at bow and bottom until it seemed at every moment that rock, not water, assailed her planking. He spent his strength in avoiding imagined rocks in the deep, rioting waters around him.

Slowly the tide was having its way with him, drawing him southward toward that very channel he had been so bent, minutes before, in racing through. Every attempt he made to keep a course to northward and safety merely drew him toward the Hellweathers and the rocks off Annet. Miller was doomed if he fought on to northward; doomed by eventual exhaustion, since he was attempting the impossible.

Rob Trevellick stared at the plunging yawl and the agitated man wrenching this way and that at the tiller, with hard, bitter eyes. His hand was firm on the tiller now.

"The Rocks!" he whispered to himself. "They're still there—waitin' for me. Did 'ee think 'ee could outwit 'em? There's three fools 'mong the Rocks now. And the biggest o' them all'd be 'ee, Rob Trevellick, if 'ee tried to save yon simpleton wi' a splintered boom in your boat."

He laughed shortly as the yawl took a smother of foam over her bow and Miller flung himself on the tiller to swing her head away from the phantom ledge. Sir Ansel, rousing himself from his absorption in the spectacle of his rival fighting for his life, turned horrified eyes upon the fisherman.

"Why don't 'ee laugh, too?" demanded Rob Trevellick savagely. "'Twas to see he drowned 'ee came to Scilly, wasn't it? Laugh, man, laugh!"

The *Banner* had been edging her way to windward on short legs with the tide and long legs against it, keeping in the channel just outside that half circle of dancing death. In this way, despite the splintered boom that threatened to snap into pieces with the strain of the wind, the *Banner* regained some of the ground she had lost in that wild run down to the cutter.

Rob, his mood of mockery gone, was fighting within himself a battle far harder than Miller waged in the laboring yawl.

"Fool!" he muttered. "'Tis not Rob Trevellick's life, 'tis little Luke's chances that go smash if 'ee try to save un. Die now an' he'll be a fisher, too, among th' old rocks—and his young uns after he. What if 'ee are a lifeboatman—'tis no lifeboat but a cripple you're in now."

He glanced again at the dancing yawl, and then at Great Crebawethan to get his position. As the *Banner* swung around under his hand he slacked off the sheet to take as much strain as he could off the creaking boom.

"Three fools for th' Rocks to grind 'stead o' one," he roared at the watching Sir Ansel, as the *Banner's* head pointed toward the yawl. "Git forward, an' scream an' shout an' beckon un to follow as we draw 'longside. —— 'ee, scream your lungs out! Shred your throat!"

With the wind abeam, and jib, mainsail and mizzen drawing, the fishing boat's blunt bow curled the water from her sides with slowly increasing force. Sir Ansel crept carefully forward and stood on the weather side of the mainmast, waiting, and shuddering, as the *Banner* lurched through seas so white and leaping that they could not but mask rocks more frightful than those that lifted their heads boldly above the whitecaps. But ever their menace was dissipated in spray and a souse of water over the bows.

The wind and currents played no favorites. As violently as they assailed Miller's yawl, they rioted about the *Banner*. But Rob did not answer violence with violence. A gale or a tide has more strength than a man, and well the Scillonian knew it. His keen eyes were fixed upon the waters around the boat, his immovable cheek and shoulder gauged the violence of the wind that came shrieking through the rocks. His hand on the tiller did not thrust it back and forth like a man doing battle. Rather it gently swayed this way and that, interpreting the mood of the telltale waters and the chill of the air on his cheek. With the tiller moved the hand that held the sheet, spilling the violent puffs, but holding the weakened boom to its work.

Miller, glancing up, white-faced, to anticipate the next gust, saw the *Banner*. Rob tucked a knee over the tiller and waved a hand; Sir Ansel, clinging to the shrouds with one hand, shouted and gesticulated madly. The boat raced on, nearer and nearer the bewildered amateur. Miller watched them come with staring eyes that slipped past the man in the bow of the *Banner* to the grim little fisherman at the tiller.

Rob raised his hand again, and beckoned him to follow. There was no possibility of anything but utter disaster in an attempt to come alongside the uncontrolled yawl in those waters. Rob held his course to southward, and swept abeam of the yawl. Easing off the sheet till it no longer drew, he passed by with slackening speed, to give Miller a chance to come about and follow close.

The man in the yawl grasped Rob's meaning, and thrust the tiller away from him. The yawl came around so sharply that she buried her lee combing in the foam and water poured into her cockpit. But she righted herself, and followed, though now her movements were less lively.

Toward that seemingly impregnable wall of black rocks and white water to the southward the *Banner* ploughed her way, and after her the yawl danced along, reeling to windward and to lee under the frantic, overreaching efforts of Miller to lift her out of the control of currents and wind alike. The man's seamanship had deserted him under the strain of his plight, and he strove to remedy the defect with muscle alone. But the yawl was a good sea-boat, and struggled on after the *Banner* like a badly ridden thoroughbred in a race.

The two staggering craft drew closer and closer to the granite chain to windward. No passage could be seen among the more scattered rocks ahead and to leeward. Miller's fear increased. He shouted wildly, questioningly to the boat ahead.

Rob Trevellick, hunched over his tiller, paid no heed. His eyes, streaming with spray, were turning ceaselessly now. From the water ahead his intense gaze leaped to the spouting bursts that rushed through the Rocks to windward, then passed on to the seas a-lee, and paused for a moment to rest on the straining boom. If that went now— He shook the thought out of his head with a growl. To the frightened man in the boat behind he raised his hand briefly in a beckoning gesture. There was no time now for more than that.

The critical moment had come. To Sir Ansel, clinging tightly to his place on the foredeck of the *Banner*, it seemed that the boat, half in control of the grip of the tide and half under the will of the man at the tiller, was rushing toward a destruction as certain as if it were an abyss that yawned ahead.

The roaring of the contending crags and water rose to a crescendo. The currents, as a rocky islet loomed higher ahead, increased in strength and waywardness.

Sir Ansel turned to send a glance of doubt and appeal back to the man at the tiller, but there was no reassurance, no recognition, even, in the stern, set countenance he saw. It was as if Rob Trevellick had been turned into stuff as immovable as the rocks that rose before them.

The fisherman saw nothing of his lookout's fear. The man on the foredeck, like the mast, and the eased-off mainsail, was nothing but an obstruction to his vigilant scrutiny of the seas ahead. He must keep all his attention for the gale, and the rocks, and the crippled pinion that might break and leave them drifting to destruction.

In the yawl behind, Miller shrank from the rocks that seemed to converge from every quarter and eyed with mounting terror the water swashing about the cockpit. He drove his boat closer and closer to the *Banner*. It did not occur to him that his craft would not gain upon the fishing boat if she were not still seaworthy. Her heaviness seemed to presage sinking.

Cool reason no longer swayed him; he was bent upon furrowing the same waters with his keel as had the *Banner*. There was safety there, and nowhere else. The blackness of the big rock dead ahead grew until it seemed to overhang the *Banner*. Rob Trevellick gently eased off his sheet to sail just leeward of it, and as he did so, a furious gust, intensified and concentrated by the bulk of the island, struck the mainsail full. Rob let go his sheet in a hurry, and the twin cataracts on either side of the *Banner's* bow died away as the boat lost headway.

Miller, shooting along just behind, caught the gust too. He luffed to clear the slow-moving boat ahead and pass between it and the big rock. Here, he sensed, was the deep water channel that must be Rob's goal. But his instinctive fear of the black granite rising beside him was too strong and he swung wildly away from the iron shore again. His bowsprit, like a stabbing lance, swept toward the *Banner*. It overrode the lower stern of the fishing boat. The pointed bow of the yawl lifted high in the air as her bob-stay ran up the counter of Trevellick's boat. It hung there suspended, depressing dangerously the stern of the *Banner*.

To Rob, intent ahead, the first intimation came when the bowsprit thrust by his shoulder. He started aside in time to avoid injury. Then, with a quick glance astern he sized up the new danger. Ducking under the bowsprit, he put the helm of the *Banner* hard over, and the nose of the boat swung into the wind.

The yawl, still hanging by the wire bob-stay, swung about with the other craft, and both drifted helplessly downwind. Around them the white waters roared threateningly, and spray from the granite pinnacle to windward came drifting down upon them like a heavy rain.

The *Banner*, though her stern was well down under the weight of the other boat's bow, had suffered little hurt, though every charging wave threw a heavier splash of water into her cockpit.

"Steady!" roared Rob encouragingly.

He sprang upon the counter, gripped the bowsprit with both his hands and heaved upward with all his strength. The fishing boat's stern settled almost imperceptibly in the water, but the amount of water coming inboard at every swell increased with dangerous rapidity. But the yawl's bob-stay was slowly sliding backward; Rob was pushing her off steadily.

Miller, dazed by this mishap, suddenly came back to himself. He threw a despairing glance at the welter of water a-lee, toward which both boats were drifting. Then he saw Rob straining to push the boats apart, and with a cry of fear rushed forward.

"Don't leave me!" he screamed, and ran out on the bowsprit with clutching hands.

But the two boats were apart now, and Rob was already at his tiller again. The *Banner's* head was paying off.

The boom swung out, almost within reach of Miller's hands. Desperately he launched himself at it. His gripping fingers failed to find a hold in the splintered end of the spar, and he plunged into a smother of foam.

Rob tossed overboard the slack of the sheet. The rope fell fairly on Miller's head, and he gripped it instinctively.

"Hang to it, man!" the fisherman shouted, and leaving his boat to come in stays, he drew the struggling man nearer. An instant later, with a powerful heave, he brought Miller's hands within grasping distance of the *Banner's* stern. Gripping him by the wrists he heaved him aboard.

Miller lay on the bottom, in the water sluicing about, and gasped for breath. He raised his head to stare at the yawl drifting rapidly astern. Silently Rob resumed his seat at the tiller, but his eyes blazed, first at the man in the bows; then at the man raising himself from the bottom.

"A close call," Miller panted, and coughed up seawater.

He looked about fearfully, and his eyes widened with surprize. The *Banner* was rising over the regular, crested swell of the open ocean; there were no rocks anywhere save astern; no white water save the whitecaps raised by the gale.

Rob Trevellick read his gaze.

"Ay; the open sea beyond Gorregan," he said calmly.

The *Banner* came about, and the fisherman shaped his course toward St. Mary's Sound. Within him a tumult of emotion was raging, but his hand was steady, and his eyes ignored the two shaken men in whom an uncomfortable self-consciousness was rising.

In silence the *Banner*, her boom creaking ominously, ran down the wind toward the Sound, rounded Gugh, and ran into the Road, and the harbor. Not until she was within the harbor, alongside the old dinghy at the *Banner's* mooring, did any one speak.

Then Sir Ansel cleared his voice.

"You will be well paid for this, my man," he said in a voice he endeavored to make cool and assured. "You have saved my life, and I do not overlook favors of that sort."

"Nor I," spoke up Miller.

Rob Trevellick stood up. His eyes dwelt steadily on the shamefaced countenance of one man and then the other. With a blunt, rough forefinger that quivered with his emotion he pointed to the dinghy.

"Get ashore, where 'ee belong," he commanded sternly. "The two of 'ee came to Scilly to settle a ha'penny grudge—what, I care not. The sea an' the rocks ha' settled it, for there's been naught but the fear o' death in your faces this day."

Sir Ansel's pale face flushed, and Miller smothered an ejaculation and spoke sharply.

"That tone will get you nothing, my man," he warned. "We're grateful, both of us, but be careful. There's more reward likely to come from respect than from impertinence."

"Respect!" repeated Rob Trevellick.

His mind was full of his escape, and what it meant to him, and to Luke, but of that he could not speak before these men.

"Respect!"

His accusing finger stabbed at Sir Ansel.

"Tell I how I can respect a man who loses heart an' head before danger threatens?"

He swung around to confront Miller.

"Tell I how I can respect a man whose wild fear drives him from his boat when danger's past?"

Rob laughed brokenly.

"Thought I'd leave 'ee, to save my own life," he charged, and Miller's eyes fell. "Listen, man, 'ee deserted an able boat in the open sea—from fear. 'Twas nought but foam a-lee o' the rocks that terrified 'ee, when I pushed her off my stern."

For a moment he was silent, and his words still scorched the two yachtsmen.

"And for reward—" he went on.

He flung his arm toward the southward.

"I'll ha' none from such as 'ee. Out on the sea's my reward—a fine stanch yawl, wi' a sup o' water in her, adrift an' deserted. There's salvage there enough to set a man up for life an' school his sons. Out o' my boat, cravens; I'll ha' her if I chase to Cornwall."

Out into the gale, with the wind whistling through her splintered boom, her rigging slack, and water sloshing about her cockpit, stormed the *Banner*, bent on a venture that might bring returns greater than a pound a day. Certainly she was no craft to sail the seas in that weather, but there was stout heart at the tiller and the Western Rocks were well to windward. And since it is courage that wins success at sea, it is hard to doubt that the *Banner* accomplished her mission.

Continuing with the fortunes of Francesco

F. R. Buckley's

Modern Serial in a Medieval Setting

*The Way of

I, HUMBLE Brother Simeon to whose hand the feel of the sword is far more familiar than that of the learned pen, as a penance for two unseemly acts ill befitting one of my holy station, hereby, in accordance with the decree of the good abbot, set down the whole story of my warrior days, the better to feel meet disgust thereat, especially since in contemplation of that impious period, I shall realize to the full how fortunate was my saving, and how sweet the life of peace. In first, I sinned mightily by throwing soup at Brother Ambrose for talking ignorantly about artillery. In second, my offense was that of doing violence with sword and fists to a young noble whom I found half-drunk at an inn, and otherwise disporting himself most shamefully. Him I cautioned in a fatherly way, but the young blood preferred to take offense, jeering at my monkish garb, and calling me "old woman." Then he had the temerity to bare his sword at me, and (*mea culpa!*) I grew hot-headed as of yore. Ah well, perhaps the youth has learned a lesson that may well serve him in the future. . . .

In my eighteenth year I was apprenticed by my father, a poor musician, to one Messer Porsini, a mercer of good standing in Rometia. Here, my father hoped, I should apply myself faithfully to my task, learn the business, perhaps even marry the squint-eyed daughter of my employer, and in time own a little shop of my own. Below my window I often heard of nights the watch-calls and the clanging of the armor of the guard of the Duke of Rometia, and I felt an irresistible longing to take down my sword from its hook (I had brought it with me from home) and stroll by myself in the dark streets.

One night, when the duke was holding a fiesta in honor of a visiting count, I yielded to the temptation, entered the palace grounds, was inveigled by several of the soldiers to partake of the flowing wine-cups. In this condition I saw two armored men dragging a crying girl. One of the men called:

"Hence, boy, this is no affair of thine."

However, being hot with wine, I whipped out my sword, pierced one man at the center of his breastplate and then had at the other till I ran him through likewise. Thereupon I ran home and fell trembling and panting on my bed. Soon I heard a hammering on the door, and the sleeping household was aroused by the deep bellow of:

"Open! In the name of the duke, open!"

Old Porsini began to quake and ran about frantically, looking for a hiding-place, for he was secretly conspiring against the person of the duke, and he thought he had been discovered and sent for. But they were after Porsini's apprentice, myself, and I was marched off between a file of the duke's guard, headed by a pinkish-bearded sergeant, my hands still stained with the blood of my escapade.

When I was brought into the presence of the duke, I found him in converse with his sister, the Countess Anita. He was imperiously telling her that his wish that she marry a certain count was final, and though she appeared highly spirited, she left the room apparently subdued to his will. The duke then turned to me.

"Why didst thou kill the Count of Monterosso?"

The Count of Monterosso! I stood paralyzed. I had thought both my victims common soldiers. I explained to the duke as best I could, and when I mentioned the girl, the duke became incensed.

"The lecher!" he exclaimed. "His lieutenant told me he was out for a stroll."

Thereupon the duke called his chaplain, sent one of his men to find the girl, and when the two were before him, he ordered the chaplain to marry the girl to me, then and there, in order, as he said, to gain two marks with one shot: The count whom he wanted out of the way for personal reasons was dead; and the duke could make a great play of

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* *This is an Off-the-Trail story. See contents page footnote.*

Sinners

virtue with the townspeople. Since I was loath at the time to accept a place in his guard, the duke gave me a bag of gold (which I in turn gave to the girl), and sneering at my preference for the mercery, dismissed me, saying the place would be open if I should make a choice anew. He gave me, too, a pardon for old Porsini, whom in truth he had found out, on condition that the mercer take me back and treat me fairly.

But Porsini turned me from his door before I had opportunity to reveal to him the paper I carried. Thereupon, seeing me thus turned out, Ercole, another apprentice, stole forth and presented me with a little money he had saved up, for (simple-hearted wretch!) he was under the impression I aspired to the hand of the mercer's daughter, and now, at my departure, I should leave him free to press his own suit. I took the money, giving him in return the duke's paper, to hold over the head of old Porsini as a club, thus insuring better treatment at his hands.

With the money I went on a three-days' drinking bout, ending up in a street-gutter, where Stella, the girl I had married so suddenly at the duke's behest, found me and brought me to her home.

In a very short time I had become part and parcel of the Olivieri household, even to the wearing of one of Papa Olivieri's suits in place of my own garments which I had ruined during my drinking bout. It then transpired that, having been promised their trade by a great many of the townspeople, Stella and I opened up a mercery with the gold the duke had given me, and for the nonce, did very well withal. Then Stella, getting into her head false notions as to position and prestige in the community, began to hint that she was too good to work in the shop, that it ill befitted the wife of a prosperous young mercer to wear the clothes she did, and other such nonsense, goaded on and abetted in it by her shrewish mother and an old virgin virago of an aunt. Stella even suggested that I cut off an inch or two off the yardstick and thus realize a little more profit on our sales, saying, poor wretch, that all the other mercers did that very thing; why not we?

Soon afterward I was summoned to Rome to attend my father who was dying; he died with my brother's name on his lips, my brother who had run away from home to seek adventure on far seas. For me it was evident that he had nothing but scorn. And thus he died, and with the proceeds that I forced from one of his debtors, I laid him away.

Traveling back to Rometia, I fell in with the pink-bearded sergeant and a troop of horse. They had been waiting on His Holiness the Pope for some message to their master, the duke. We talked of many things, and the more I weighed my own hapless condition with that of these care-free swashbucklers, the more I envied them. When I got home, I found things had gone from bad to worse. Trade had fallen off to almost nothing; our creditors were threatening for their money. And then I saw that Stella had stooped to the littleness of breaking three or four inches from the yardstick. That, what with my disgust with things in general, was the last straw. I made to rush forth into the night without hat or cloak, and Stella cried out piteously—

"Oh Francesco, where art thou going?"

"Where I should have gone in the beginning!" I shouted—"to join the duke's guard.

MY FIRST assignment in the duke's service was not entirely to my taste, and you shall judge why. There was a certain wealthy count that the duke wished to marry to his sister, the Countess Anita (her former marriage being since annulled). Now this nobleman was enamored of a famous courtezan. It fell to me to convince her that it were best for her to depart from the realms of Rometia. I forced my way into her castle through a balcony, and after some warm sword play with her guards, during which I killed two of them and received a slight cut myself, I brought the woman to terms, and she sent the writhing, rat-faced little worm of a count about his business. I gave her a parchment with an order for twenty thousand ducats from the duke. Thereupon the wanton made sheep's-eyes at me, but I would have none of her.

"Go home then to thy milk and water," she jeered.

So I rode home. I went to Sergeant Lucio's quarters in the citadel, and being worn out, and stiffened of my wound, I slept long and deep. I awoke when a great voice rumbled in my ear.

"What?" I asked sleepily.

"Arise, Francesco," roared the pink-bearded Lucio, "and on the instant! The duke demands to see thee."

The duke was in his cabinet when we arrived. What was my astonishment when the captain, my superior, looked at me as if he did not know me, and addressed the sergeant thuswise!

"Retain thy prisoner till I return, Sergeant."

"Prisoner!" I gasped.

" 'Tis but the duke's mode of keeping his skirts clean, fool!" cautioned Lucio in a whisper. "Since thou'st done well, there's nothing to fear."

When the duke heard my story, he was immensely pleased and presented me with a medal of his new Order of Jesus Christ. Then I heard the duke order that payment be stopped on the warrant that I had given to the woman. He intimated that he would stop her mouth for her . . . My disgust knew no bounds. Here I had betrayed a weak woman to the knife, forsooth, of one of the duke's assassin's—and had been rewarded for my valor—with a cross of Jesus Christ! Alas!

Soon afterward the duke had another delicate mission for me to perform. A certain Pietro Uccello, a leader of marauding free-lance troops, had of late made much trouble for the duke; wherefore he had his physician concoct a mortal poison which I was to convey to Uccello's camp and put some in his food. For that deed I should receive absolution from the Church and a sublieutenancy from the duke. A betrayer of women and a poisoner, I! I played sick for several days, till the duke, becoming impatient, ordered me arrested. Then I fled for my life—and direct to the camp of Uccello. I had some little trouble in convincing him that I was there for my own safety and not for his destruction—for Uccello knew of the duke's plot. And so I joined the ranks of the marauders, learned much, and in time rose to a lieutenancy; and when Captain Uccello was killed in combat, I naturally assumed his place.

About the time of my becoming head of the troop, we were hired to take by storming a certain castle belonging to the Count Roberto, husband of the Countess Anita, sister of the Duke of Rometia. The count (the castle was his property) had in some manner offended his lady and had been forcefully ejected from the place. The poor count had had the temerity to collect forces to besiege the castle. The duke, hearing of this show of boldness on the part of the weak-kneed Roberto, and his own troops being occupied in other directions, found himself under the necessity of accepting the services of *condottieri*. And thus, I, Francesco di Vitali, who had fled the duke for my life, was now in position to deal with the duke with proper dignity—and to command a fat figure for my services.

I laid my plans for the campaign, using strategy such as was new in the annals of warfare of the time. Then, using my flanks as decoys, I smashed through Roberto's forces at the center with my speediest column infantry. The battle was a rout, and my whole force was soon within the castle gate. I had not seen the count himself in the combat, so I guessed he had sped to gather more forces.

I told the sentry that I wished to see the countess.

"I—I dare not," says the man.

"Dost thou think me a better person to beard than the lady?"

Seemingly he was spared this mistake, for he was off very suddenly. At length he came forth from a doorway where I awaited him in the corridor; and his face was as white as wool.

"THE countess will not see the Captain," says he.

"Didst tell her I commanded it instanter?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Is she bedded?"

"N-no, Captain."

"Then stand here at the door as sentry," says I, pushing open the door through which he had returned; "and if the countess summons any of thy fellows, and they come, tell them to stay and keep thee company; for the man that enters this room ere I leave it shall be hanged within five minutes. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Captain."

There was an antechamber, and a man-at-arms on guard therein.

"Begone," says I. "Report to my lieutenant on the walls. There's more work here to be done than standing on a carpet."

"I am here by the countess' orders," says the fellow sullenly.

"And thou'lt be there by mine," I told him, pulling from my belt the commission signed by Salviati in the duke's name, and showing it to him. "Look you, fellow, I do thee the honor to present my credentials; they are from the Duke of Rometia; thou canst report them to thy fellows of the countess' guard. Thou canst also report that I shall extend this grace no more. The next man that hesitates before an order as thou hast, I stab on the spot. Now—march!"

He moved slowly even then, which made me the more realize that my command was not to be undisputed; and when he had passed the outer door, I laid my hand to the fastening of the inner.

It was locked.

"Open!" I called.

There was a pause.

"Who is there?" came a woman's voice.

Now I perceived clearly what was to happen; and before answering, I drew my pistolet from my belt.

"The Captain Francesco di Vitali, commanding this castle."

There was another pause; then:

"Cosimo!" cried the countess angrily. "Sentry!"

Of course there was no answer. I hoped that she would come storming to the door, and save violence, but she did not. After that call, there was silence in the room.

"Will the countess open?" I asked, putting the muzzle of the pistolet to the door-lock.

She made no reply to this; so, without further ado, I blew the bolt and its socket to the other side of the room, thrust the door open with my shoulder and entered in a cloud of smoke. The countess, at the other end of the room, was tugging at the fastenings of a window which looked down into the court; and at the sound of the explosion, she had hesitated in the midst of her project to call aid from her guardsmen there below—there was a group of them, most like listening to what Cosimo, the late sentry, had had to tell of my message.

Now she stared at me with a most strange expression of countenance—as what wonder? Doubtless, from the moment first she drew breath, this was the first time her lightest wish had been disregarded by any one save her brother.

"Your pardon, lady," I said gently.

At this, which she took for a sign of weakness and of fear on my part, I saw her become pale with rage; and her hand approached her bosom, as if to seek a dagger. Therefore:

"I had an urgent question to ask your Ladyship, concerned with the defense of this place; and moreover, I wished to make clear who commandeth here. 'Tis I, and no other— If the countess attacks me with that stiletto, it will be taken from her and she will be placed under arrest."

She had the knife in her hand, and had already advanced one step, intending to stab me. At my words, however, she halted, and looked me in the eyes furiously; yet withal, as if measuring the earnestness of my intent.

"By whose order?" she asked slowly.

"By mine, since I command here; by the Duke Allessandro's in fine, since I command here by virtue of his commission."

"Then 'tis thy conceit that I am nothing in this castle?" she demanded.

"On the contrary, the Countess' authority can much assist mine own. That is wherefore I do not wish it weakened before the men; as certes it will be if your Ladyship forces me to imprison her."

We stood in silence for a long time, while she convinced herself that I meant what I had said; and while she essayed, by her haughty look, to convince me that the power was on her side, not on mine. In this she failed; and, seeing she had failed, she thought a moment, smiled and threw the stiletto down upon a table. Following this, she flung herself down on a great silken couch by the window—whose armorial blazons in stained glass threw brilliant colors upon the white silk of her dress—and regarded me, still smiling.

"What is thine urgent question concerning the defense of this place, Signor Captain?" she asked; and I have no doubt she looked as beautiful at that moment as ever she did afterward; but I saw it not; she had as well smiled at a wooden man, such was then my attitude toward all women.

"I would ask your Ladyship if, when counseling the seizure of this place from the count, his Highness the duke did say when he might relieve it from siege."

"When he should have troops free from his other affairs."

"Is there any knowledge of when that may be?"

"In a month's time, belike. But why?"

"Is there any method by which the duke might be reached by a messenger, begging aid at an earlier date?"

"Is not rather that thy business, seeing thou'rt in command, Signore Captain?"

"I ask for information."

"I, too, asked for information; but I have had no reply. Why this eagerness for the raising of the siege?"

"Because we have not food enough in the castle for a fortnight, much less a month."

"I have heard of sorties to reprovision."

"There are no sorties of the kind to be made with infantry, madame," I told her, "nor with fifty horse against ten times the number. Moreover, the Count Roberto will return to the investment, with still more force, I do suppose."

"He hath gone to seek artillery," says the countess, as carelessly as if it were a matter of artichokes he had gone for. "It would have been better, had thou brought more horse, then, Captain."

"Under pardon, the food would not have lasted a week then," I remarked, "and, with respect, there is no time to discuss tactics with your Ladyship. 'Tis help I seek."

All this time she was smiling at me; now she laughed outright.

"Then thou hast all I can give thee," she said. "The best place for the letting down of a messenger is by rope from the wall over the precipice; it is not guarded as a rule. I have sent one already to my brother; but he hath not returned."

There was nothing more to be said; I thanked her, bowed and prepared to go.

"We shall meet again at supper?" she asked, still regarding me with that peculiar smile, such as boys wear when they watch a favored dog behaving human-fashion.

"Would it be permitted that I sat in the Countess' presence?"

She bit her lip at that.

"Another table could be placed near me, so that we could discuss— But possibly thou art noble, or at least of gentle blood?"

"Nay. But my men— It is necesary that my men regard me as higher than the highest noble, what time I command them. Under favor, therefore, I will sup in my own quarters."

She laughed again.

"Thou hast at least the tricks of nobility," says she—which astonished me woundily; for the last thing to be told about a trick by its practitioner, is that it is a trick. "As thou wishest, then. *A rivederci*, Signor Captain."

"*A rivederci*, Signora la Contessa."

And I withdrew.

'Twas a funereal supper I had; for I must set the example to my men, and eat frugally of the siege-ration which, in my ignorance of the duke's plans, I had needs set low; bread, cheese, flour-paste boiled, and wine. Benedetto, who ate with me, was weary, and his nose still pained him from the blow I had given him with my gauntlet; moreover he represented that the main gate of the castle had not been designed to resist artillery-fire, and that if the beseigers brought any engines of this sort, without doubt it must fall.

"The Count Roberto is expected, with cannon," I remarked, "but sure he can not arrive before tomorrow; and tomorrow morning at dawn we will strengthen the gate."

"With what?"

"With earth. The granary is tight against rats and the grain is in sacks. We will empty the sacks on the floor, fill them with earth, and pile them behind the gate; there should be enough to fill the arch, and the work will keep the men's minds off their food."

"Hard work maketh men hungry," says Benedetto, gloomily eating his last piece of bread, and trying to fill the void that yawned for more with great draughts of wine.

"I shall require a messenger, to be sent forth to find the duke, this night. Find one, and bring him to me, so soon as it shall be dark."

"None of our men know this country."

"The countess' guard are fellows from about here, most like. Whatever the case, Benedetto, hear me; when I have given an order, 'tis thy part to find ways and means to carry out the same. I was hasty with thee this morn, before the attack, but I will not be questioned."

"God wot, 'tis not my pleasure to ask questions, when the task set is possible, Francesco—Captain; but in case, if 'tis so that none has knowledge of the lay of this land, or will not avow it, what am I to do? Beget a geographer on the instant?"

"If the task is impossible, the more credit to thee for performing it. Any fool can perform the possible. 'Tis by the doing of what can not be done that alone one gains fame and riches in this world," says I, rising. "Now I go to inspect the guard on the battlements, and to consider, Benedetto. Have the man here when I return."

"He will have no horse!" cries my lieutenant, as I left the room. "How can he get to the duke afoot?"

"That is a difficulty which, in turn, thou wilt leave to him."

And I went, smiling at the thought that captaincy had its tricks, just as had nobility; that this mode of commanding Benedetto was as artificial and as calculated as the countess' refusal to sit at table with me; or as my father's long-past urgings of me to lead a calm, respected life; or my former master's ravings to the same end;

or the protestations of Stella Olivieri and her mother, concerning the worshipfulness of love and marriage. Strange, that with truth and fasehood before it, humanity should have chosen to build its world of lies!

A sentry spoke to me as I passed his place of watch.

"Reinforcements arrive, Captain," he said.

Here was one thing true, at any rate; Count Roberto had not only gone forth to seek guns, but he had found them. As the dusk fell, I perceived a cavalcade, escorting several great brutes of cannon on wheeled carriages, which had emerged from the wood by the same road we had taken, and was progressing toward the remnants of the detachment we had fought; it was camped well out of range of us now, and its fires were beginning to gleam.

I watched until the two forces had merged about the fires, and continued my walk of inspection. Everything was in order; I had almost returned to the bridge-way leading from the walls to my quarters when a horn blew over the main-gate, and from sentry to sentry, the word flew that the enemy demanded a parley. As I started for the gate, Benedetto came rushing along the wall, with news that the Count Roberto was waiting before the portcullis, under truce, and with an escort of two men.

"Let him wait a little. Go summon the Countess Anita."

He saluted and went hastily; I strolled easily toward the place best adapted for a parley. I had picked it out earlier in the inspection, for the reason that it was between two wall-guns, which could be fired quickly in case of need; and before showing myself, I called two gunners, and bade them light their matches.

"Do not fire until I give the word; keep the matches well away; if there is a discharge, we shall have to stay here forever, or be hanged if we surrender."

"Aye, Captain."

Now the countess hastened up, wrapped in a great dark cloak and hooded; and, with her at my side, I stepped to the breastwork between the gun-muzzles.

"Both aim at the count," I said to the men in a low tone; and then called forth, "I am ready to parley!"

So—to make a long matter short, for I will not detail the conversation—parley we did for the quarter of an hour, in a classical manner somewhat complicated by the count's infirmity of speech. Gravely, the tradition-bound old idiot called upon me to surrender, well witting that I was there for the sole end of defying him; gravely I refused. Then, in the prescribed forms, he offered me mercy if I would accept the same while I stood in no need of it; threatening that if in the future I should apply for quarter, it would be withheld. These, and a few similar foolishnesses of the last century, made up all my part of the parley; for just as Count Roberto began to stutter forth his real feelings concerning the affair, out of the corner of my eye did I perceive Benedetto, arrived behind me and wishful to speak.

"He is demanding me," says the Countess Anita, rapping on my back-plate. "Give place, and I will entertain him. Talk thou with the lieutenant."

"The messenger is ready," says Benedetto. "Meseemed it would be better to get him gone while this parley holds, Captain; doubtless the count knows the sorties from his own castle, and will guard them."

" 'Tis well thought of. Aye, let him go without delay. Lower him down the face of the rock, by a rope from the turret window—thou knowest?"

"Aye. And the message?"

"He is to find the Duke Alessandro as quickly as may be, and tell him we have no more provisions than may suffice us for a fortnight; we must be relieved by then, if his Grace would have this castle. It will take five hundred horse to do the relieving—for the rest, we can sally and aid them. Is the messenger one that can remember so much?"

"Aye; one of the countess' guard, and not thick-skulled."

"Good. Bid him begone forthright."

Benedetto hastened away; and, turning mine eyes and my attention to the parley between the Countess Anita and her spouse, I perceived that the time of formalities was long since passed. As I spoke my last words to Benedetto, the noble lady between the guns had called forth something which I had not heard but which, by its tone, was no compliment; and now, unintelligible to me by reason of his mangled tongue, the count was bellowing a torrent of words in reply.

What was their purport, I have never

known; something woundily scurrilous, belike; for of a sudden, before I could divine her intention or make a move to arrest her; before the gunners to each side of her were 'ware there was aught toward, the countess had given a gasp of rage, turned from her stand at the parapet and, snatching the match from the hand of the cannoneer, fired one of the wall-guns full at her husband.

Lucky for him that in the heat of the discussion, he had moved his horse a little to one side, and that the gunner, interested in the quarrel, had forgot to train the sights on him again! The touch-hole spurted fire, the muzzle belched a fan of flame into the gathering darkness; and, above a yell of rage from Roberto and the boom of the escort's pistols firing at us, I heard the whine of the heavy ball, rebounding from some stone; then the scurry of horses' hoofs, retreating.

"So!" says the countess; and, flinging down the match, looked me defiantly in the eyes; to which gaze I replied in kind (notwithstanding that the two gunners were watching me and trembling visibly), until such time as the guard of that wall, alarmed by the explosion, had clattered up at the run.

Then:

"Madame Countess," says I, "that was ill done."

She made no reply, but raised her chin haughtily.

"I warned your Ladyship before that I, and no other, am in command of this castle, and that my orders, and no others are to be obeyed. My order was that no offense was to be made upon the Count Roberto."

"I am not accustomed to receive orders," says she, scorning to protest that she knew not of this one.

"It is evident," says I. "The matter must be remedied. Corporal, place this lady under arrest. She is to be confined in her apartments under strict guard, until my further pleasure."

The corporal stepped forward, as the custom is, saluted, and placed himself at the prisoner's right hand. As for Anita, after one horrified glance from him, and from the waiting soldiers, to me, she thrust my man violently aside, and began to storm—

"You dare—"

"Corporal!"

"Aye, Captain."

"In case of resistance, you will use what force is necessary."

"Aye, sir."

"Remove the prisoner."

And she was removed, naturally without violence; too well she knew the uselessness and (what was more to her) the non-dignity of resistance. She looked me long in the eyes, and by some strange trick (as I thought) of the torchlight, she seemed for one instant to smile; then she turned, placed herself in the midst of the guard, and moved down the battlement toward her apartments.

I leaned over the courtyard parapet until the guard had halted; until I had heard her door close with an angry slam; and until I had heard the corporal post two sentries outside it; then, handing over command to Benedetto, who had returned with the report that the messenger was gone, I relieved the men at the wall-guns without rebuke, and sought my bed.

But this, for me, was one of those abominable nights, born of fatigue and memories, wherein a man falls early and heavily asleep, to wake again widely about midnight and to lie in his bed thereafter, thinking.

So did I.

I had been dreaming—the dream which first came to me in camp, that night of Stella's message; and which I had dreamed many times, to my strange great comfort, in the five years since. But tonight, for the first time, the little girl in the housetop had been uncomfortable to me; her eyes had held reproach instead of their accustomed grave sweetness; and, when I asked her name, she had turned away her face without answer. And, stretching out my hands to touch her, I had seen her dissolve into a strip of cold gray light—a window—the lancet window opposite the Count Roberto's bed, wherein I lay.

A desolate awakening; though, why, if the reader comprehendeth not, sure I can not explain. But I was certain that I had dreamed of the little Maria for the last time; that I should not see her again; and a wave of lonely misery swept over me, very comparable to that I had known when I had lost Stella. The same, indeed; as why not, since the causes for both were the same—to wit, the lack of a recipient for the fruits of my labors?

Here (I thought, lying there) were myself and my band in this castle, doomed to pace walls, block gates, cannonade and be cannonaded, eat salt-meat and unraised bread, kill or be killed by the end of the siege—for what, and for whose benefit?

Now I had thirty years of age; whereinto had been crowded the events of most men's long lives; meseemed that the pattern of existence should be declaring itself amid the tangle of incident; that the bright thread to be displayed by all this weaving, that the path sought in all this wandering, that the goal searched for by all this quest, should soon be in sight.

While I had been happy, I had thought little of all this; 'twas this night's dream, and the loss I did feel it forthshadowed, had reminded me. After a little more thought, unhappy and useless as what had gone before, I arose, threw on my clothes and a cloak, passed the staring sentry at my door, and went to walk in the courtyard.

The whole castle was silent as the grave, except for the sounds that must always come from a sleeping army; a snore occasionally, and sometimes the clatter of a horse's shoes, shifting on the flags of the stables. And the courtyard was dark—the darker for the rose glare in the southern sky, where the enemy's watch-fires were burning beyond our walls. Against this tinting of the night, the towers of the castle lifted themselves solemn and heavy and inscrutable; the southeast with its watch-balcony, whereon gleamed the armor of a sentinel; the sullen southwest, commanding the great gate; then, as I completed half my tour of the court, came into view the turret over the precipice, and the northwest tower, wherein were the Countess Anita's apartments.

There was no light in her windows; but as I passed below, meseemed I saw her, in her white dress of that evening, standing at an open pane. I passed on; three times more, increasing my speed as I inclined more and more to think, did I encircle the yard; and the fourth time, I heard the countess laugh to herself as I passed.

"Captain!" she called softly.

"Signora?"

She opened the window wide, and leaned forth with her arms upon the sill. Before she said more, however, she reached within to the couch behind her, and withdrew a cushion to save her elbows from the roughness of the stone.

"Seemingly, thou, too, dost find it impossible to sleep," says she. "Is it remorse for having locked me up, Captain?"

"I have not thought of the matter again," said I; which was no more than the truth.

"Yet 'twas not a deed for which I should have thought thou had taste."

"I have no taste in such matters, signora; save that an order given by me must be obeyed."

She laughed again; then paused.

"Captain," says she at last, "I doubt 'tis thy intention to keep me a prisoner until such time as I shall be more—less—"

"Yes, signora."

"Who is to be the judge of that time?"

"Myself."

She laughed again, and stood.

"Then I beseech you, since I have no taste for captivity, and we are both awake, to do me the honor of a little conversation with thee now, Signor Captain. Thou knowest the stairway."

This surprized me much.

"It is—very late."

"The remark should have come from me, were it to be made at all," says the countess haughtily. "I pray you, Captain, oblige me."

And she shut the window; standing below, much inclined for conversation, no matter with whom, yet doubtful of this affair, I heard her speak to her waiting-woman, and saw the window glow with the light of a candle. Well—I was puzzled; for her tone, and above all, her laugh, had not prepared me for a quick submission to discipline; but, after hesitance, I opened the stairway door that gave on the court, mounted the stairs, and commanded the sentry to knock upon the broken door.

The serving woman opened it; asked my name, announced me as if I were a stranger from a thousand leagues distance, and at last, having received permission to admit me, did open the door with a courtesy.

"Go!" says Anita to her.

"Under favor, I should be obliged," I put in, "if your Ladyship would command her to leave open the door."

"The door?" I perceived two bright spots of red spring into the countess' cheeks as she stood by the table with the candle upon it. "Upon God's body, Master Captain, you are pleased to be very insulting."

"I am aware," I told her, "that the suggestion should have come from your Ladyship, for her own reasons. Since it has not so come, I must be permitted to put it forth, for mine."

She stared at me angrily; and then, once more, meseemed a smile moved her lips.

"Open the door," says she to the servant. "And then go— The matter is then one of discipline, not chastity, Captain?"

"Your Ladyship must see that the effect on the soldiers, soldiers being—"

"Yes, yes, yes."

She took a chair by the table, and looked at me.

"Captain," says she, in a slow way that showed she was conscious of strange behavior, "be seated."

Of course, I made no move to obey her. She laughed.

"Come, I beseech you to believe me serious. I ask you to sit, in earnest of what I am about to tell you. There is a chair behind you. Must you sit upon the edge of it like that?"

I bounded up again.

"Signora," says I, flushing. "I did not come here to be mocked!"

She rose likewise.

"My good sir," she responded, "I did not summon you for that purpose. On the contrary, 'twas to suggest that, since we are (whatever you may say concerning your absolute command) the two holders of supreme power in this castle, where we are likely to remain for some time, we should cease to mock each other, as we have been doing."

"I am not conscious—"

"Oh, *peste*, man, thou'rt as conscious as I am, or I should not have troubled to speak with thee! Well thou knowest that all this brutality of thine is but a pretense and a mask for the ends of discipline. In thy heart, thou'd no desire to smash thy lieutenant's nose with a gauntlet t'other day—yes, my serving wench recounted me that with tremblings; and, what doth concern us more nearly, thou wert aware that I did well to shoot at my revered husband when he called me—what he did. 'Twas the sacred need of maintaining discipline made thee arrest me, was't not?"

"Call it so, signora."

"I will. But canst thou not see that I, like all nobles, have a discipline to maintain likewise? And, had I not replied as I did to my husband's words, overheard by those cannoneers, that discipline would have been shattered."

We stared at each other.

"If we continue blindly," says the countess, "we shall be continually at conflict; with most men in thy place, or with most women in mine, it would of necessity be so; the stupid are born to nobility or to captaincy, and perform the rituals of their office by rote. I think that thou, Signor Vitali, art as 'ware of the falseness of it all as I; therefore I propose to thee that, while leading our inferiors by the nose as they are accustomed, we attempt not these foolish deceits between ourselves. Thus we shall be united, instead of at odds; our power of command will be doubled, instead of halved. What sayest thou?"

I was about to say—so much a part of myself had become the gestures of command—that I had no need for my power to be doubled, and that certes I would not permit it to be halved; but before my astonishment would let me open my mouth, the countess broke in fiercely—yet always in a tone that would not reach the sentries:

"At least answer me not like a parrot, without thought, or I do retract my compliments to thy brains. The ease of command aside, Captain, when thou'lt have had as much as I have, of talking by the book, thou'lt covet such frankness as mine. For all my twenty-eight years, I have talked naught but prescribed rubbish; to my brother because he was duke; to my husband because of his state and my brother's desire for his castle; to my friends because they were either higher or lower than myself. I have longed for the opportunity I think to perceive in thee; the time will come when thou'lt long for it too; and 'tis rare thou'lt find one able to lay aside the mask at will, or willing if he be able."

"Signora—" says I, still dumbfounded.

She smiled; and after a moment, I smiled too.

"Would it not be pleasant to lay aside captaincy, whiles, and be thyself?"

"Aye."

"Then 'tis agreed. We will combine our disciplines for the commonalty, and abolish them for ourselves. But I am not sorry that I shot at the Count Roberto."

"Nor I that I placed your Ladyship under arrest."

We smiled again; she held out her hand, and I kissed it.

"Then—good night, friend Captain."

"Good night, signora."

I withdrew, and dismissed the sentries at her door. One of them, being new to the troop, permitted a corner of his mouth to move slightly, wherefore I placed him upon bread and water until the siege should be raised, without reason given.

The other I took with me; posted him outside my door, and kept him there (to avoid misunderstanding) until, refreshed by sleep, I rose for the next day.

CHAPTER XIV

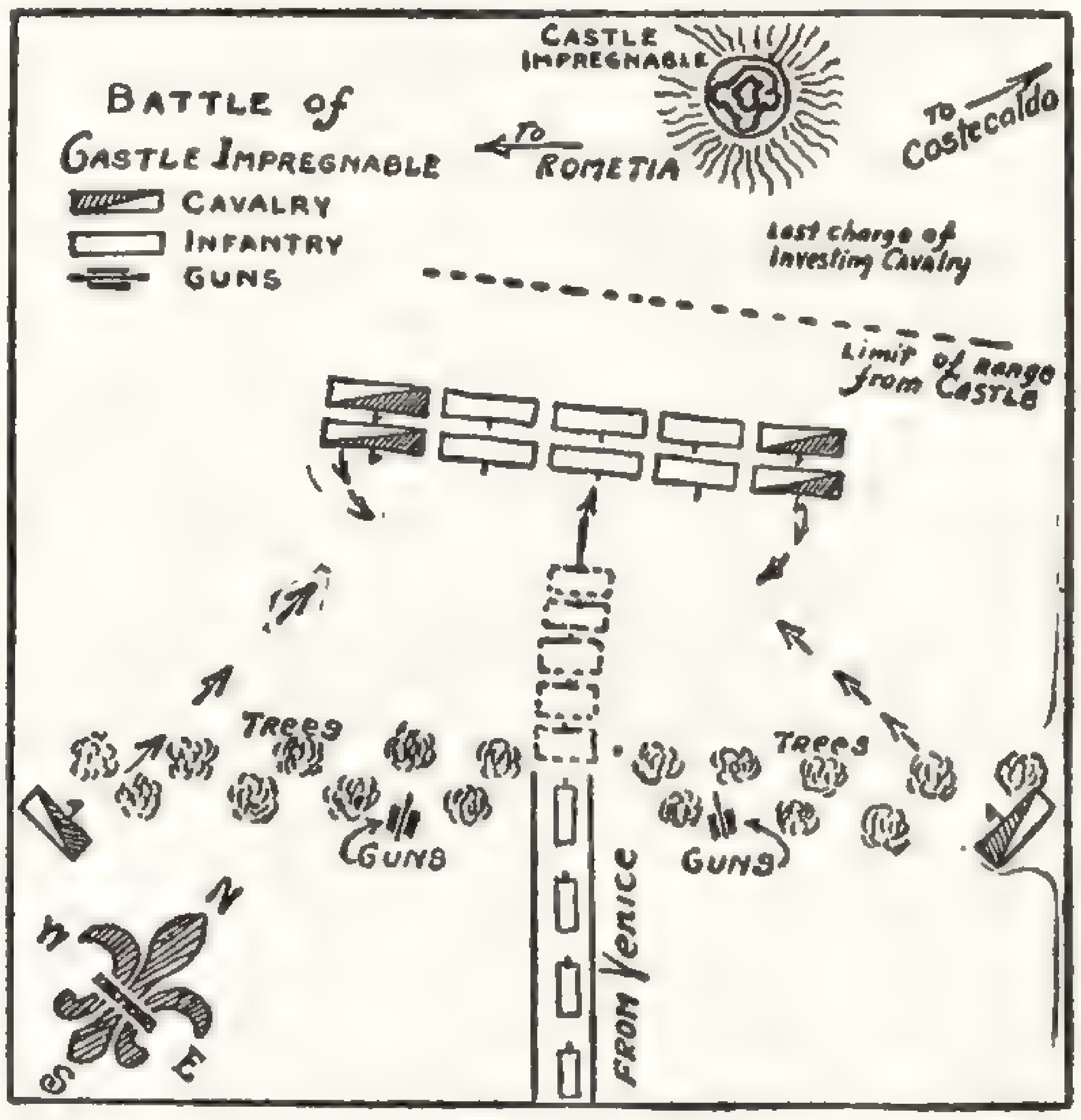
OF A STRANGE TURN

I WILL not detail the course of that siege. It was a dull affair; and, even had there been deeds of daring daily, sure the folk of today are glutted with accounts of wars which, written by men that never saw a battle, are far too heroic for pen of mine to equal. Though, now I bethink me, one of these same accounts (put forth some five years later, when I had no need to be puffed) concerned myself in this very affair of the Castle Impregnable; it recounted how, roused from my bed by a hundred of the enemy that had scaled the walls, I confronted them in my shirt and killed all but four, of whom three died later. 'Twas very circumstantial; but in fact the hundred men were but twelve, led by a scatter-brained young knight; the sentries saw them ere their grapnel was fast to the wall; they were overpowered one by one as they climbed the rope; and I confronted them in my shirt (the shirt was quite true) only to tell Benedetto to fling them off the southwest tower into the moat, which was done.

Count Roberto was not for such tricks. After a day's bombardment of the main gate (which, despite the bigness of his cannon, did him no good by reason of the earth-bags) he withdrew to a prudent distance, set a double guard to prevent the going or coming of messengers, and settled to starve us out.

Nevertheless, my messenger to the duke won back to us, though with such news that I should have despaired, had not a new survey of the provisions revealed enough for a month—counting the horses; counting them as meat, I mean. This discovery was due to the Countess Anita, now my staunch and helpful ally; she had applied to the Count Roberto's steward, who had been left in the castle, such pressure that he had confessed the existence of a secret magazine, filled with foodstuffs and stoned up by that devil-possessed old fox against such an event as had come to pass. Had not the rats been at it, there would have been enough for two months, or even three; as it was, meseemed the supply would but prolong the agony of the siege, without enabling us to hold out to any profitable end.

For the duke had sent back word that certain forces upon which he had counted in his own war had deserted him; that the affair would therefore detain him as long as God pleased (which is always a long time); and that we had better hold the castle nevertheless, under pain of his most heavy displeasure.



The Countess Anita was with me when we received these news; it was to her, and not to me, that the messenger had been recommended, and it taught me much to see with what amiability she listened to her brother's words—so long as the soldier was present. Afterward, she called him—but no matter.

"What are these forces that have left the duke?" I demanded of the man; trying to dissimulate my rage as she did, and succeeding very ill.

"May it please your Honor, it is Matteo Scarlatti's band of *condottieri*."

"For what reason?"

"It was said about the duke's camp that some one in Venice had engaged them, promising on the duke's behalf more money than his Grace was willing to pay; also misrepresenting the size of the affair."

At this, I could not but rise and pace the floor.

"So," says I, "Matteo Scarlatti withdrew, displeasure or no displeasure, and hath sought fresh battlefields, eh?"

"It was said that he had retired to Costecaldo, your Honor, there to await a delegation—"

"Captain," says Anita, looking at me coolly, "will you be pleased to dismiss this man?"

"But, signora—"

"I would speak to you alone. The rest of his tidings will keep."

There was no denying her; I told the fellow to go, and to draw five pieces from Benedetto for his success.

The moment he was gone, the countess arose and confronted me.

"Well?" says she.

"That old dog of a Salviati lied of set purpose," I snarled. "To Scarlatti and to me—to get us cheap."

She nodded.

"Why not? Did he not succeed? Art thou still expecting scruples of princes, Signor Captain?"

"With me he succeeded. Not with Scarlatti."

"And why with thee?"

"Because he lied me into a trap from which I can not escape, *per Bacco;* the goat-bearded—"

"So. And will the sortie from the trap be eased if all thy men know thou'rt enraged and despairing—as thou wast about to advise your messenger?"

That was very true.

"Signor Francesco, meseems thyself is in need of discipline— Is't not time for thy tour of the battlements?"

"Yes. But I had thought, after this, to have my lieutenant make it."

"Nay; on the contrary; we will go together, and undo what perchance thy unguardedness hath done. Maid. Ho, wench! My cloak, and come after us."

So, for the first time of many, Anita made the circuit of the walls with me, and I saw with mine own eyes once again, the working of the superstition of noble blood. The men on guard, told carelessly by her that all was well, were twice as convinced as if I had told them the same; the cannoneers, of whom one group were trying long shots at the enemy's encampment, maneuvered their piece under her eye, more smartly than ever they had under mine—and that was smartly enough, on my salvation.

"At what do you shoot?" asked the countess, of my old sergeant-gunner, who saluted, coughed, blushed as well as he could with a complexion like curried leather, and looked at me.

"Well, man? Answer!"

"With your Ladyship's favor, we are trying to land a ball in your Ladyship's noble husband's tent, your Ladyship."

"What success?"

"I am glad to tell your Ladyship they fall short."

"Fall short?" says I.

"I am sorry to report to your Honor that such is the case, Captain. I was awaiting permission to try a double charge."

"Certainly."

The old fellow scratched his jowl, as two other men started to measure out the load.

"It would perhaps be better if your Ladyship and his Honor the Captain retired behind the bastion."

"In case the gun should burst?" demands Anita.

"They have burst before, signora."

"Then rubbish, man! Fire your gun; we will stand where we are."

And fire they did, visibly adoring her; and on her account, even, defying me to the extent of withdrawing part of the double charge, lest anything untoward occur. Anita, too, saw them perform this idiot legerdemain (whereby the ball still fell short, wasting itself and the powder)—and as we walked away to the next post, she touched my arm and smiled.

"'Tis as I told thee, thou seest, Captain; I could have been a powerful hindrance to thee; just as I am a powerful aid. Is it not so?"

"Yes, signora."

"What now?"

I had sighed, without knowing why; but she must know, and did most straitly question me; so that at last, I was fain to say that, with her permission, I did wonder that she and the Count Roberto together had not accomplished great things.

She halted, and looked me in the face.

"Nay, that sigh was for thine own griefs," says she; and reflected.

"Thou wert more like wondering (as I wonder) that thyself and thy wife have not accomplished—"

Now we had reached the way to her apartments; she paused with her hand upon the door; and, looking at me, perceived that I had drawn in my breath to speak—and thought better of it.

She smiled.

"Come; was there not to be candor between us? Thou wert about to say thy wife resembled me no more than doth the Count Roberto yourself. Was't not so?"

I made no answer.

"If this is the first time thou'st grieved over the ill-assortment of marriages in this world, thou'rt lucky, Signore Captain. They say the things are arranged in Heaven; I doubt it must be the amusement of the very young angels— Where is thy wife?"

"In Rometia, signora; with my young son."

She considered me.

"After I have taught thee more that thou needest to know, there should be a high future for thee, Captain," says she. "A marriage like thine, forced upon thee, and celebrated without banns, could be annulled."

Then she had remembered me, all this time; from that night in the duke's cabinet. My heart gave a thump. Considering me, I doubt not she marked this.

"Well?"

"That would make a bastard of my son," says I, rough because of my astonishment.

She smiled.

"One thing to be taught thee, ere thou rise to high destiny, Captain, is—not to fear harsh words. They are a well-reputed weapon of those who would keep thee down."

"It is a lesson I must learn then, signora, at the expense of some other than a child. Under your favor."

She still considered me, still smiling; and at last put out her hand.

"That is foolish of thee," she said, "but—honorable. Good-by!"

So we parted.

IT WAS three days ere she made the round of the battlements again in my company; then we talked of the habits of princes. It was my advice that they were to blame for the strange madness of human society, wherein a thousand able men work in rags to put velvets on the back of one man able in naught but effrontery and tricks; 'twas she who first put clearly before me what I should have observed long before—that the poor slaves of people are in fault for demanding masters; and that nobles are no more culpable than is, for example, a man who picks the pockets of another that hath hanged himself of his own free will.

Again it was two days before we made the patrol together; this time, she demanded how I, pitying the poor people, could bear to wage war and kill so many of them.

"It is nearer scorn than pity, signora; and if 'twere pity, still it is demonstrable that I must live at their expense; if not by killing them in battle, then by cheating them in the mercery trade. And, having tried mercery, I prefer the soldiering, where I may admit my ruffianism. It saves lying."

"Most ruffians," says she, looking at me in a strange, gentle way, "do not confess their ruffianism."

"Most ruffians," says I, "are also liars."

Next day, starting my round alone, I was unhappy, knowing not why, until of a sudden I saw her in my path ahead, leaning in a crenellation of the rampart, and watching the enemy's patrol.

That day we talked of Stella; a little only, not much; and the day after, I told her of the little girl on the housetop, whom thereunto I had mentioned to no living soul. She did not laugh—I had known she would not; she understood that in losing that dream I was heavily bereaved; yet afterward, in the aching loneliness of the night, I would I had not told her of it, meseemed that speech had renewed my regret.

Once again, I could not sleep; once again I rose, cloaked myself, and went to walk in the courtyard; and it was as I passed her window, closed and reflecting a cold moon from its panes, that suddenly I knew I was in love with the countess. The truth came to me with no shock; simply meseemed that I must talk with her; that, were she by my side, there would be no loneliness in my heart, and no trouble in my soul; that her company would put the one to flight, and her converse the other.

But that calm desire was no more than the beginning; I had not completed another circuit of the court before the thought came that we were worlds apart, brought together in space for a moment by this siege; we should separate when the siege ended, and, if it lasted a year, that would be but an instant in the eternity of my need for her.

So came despair, and into the peaceful harvest of my mind, thrust a torch.

I could not sleep at all; I walked the courtyard until dawn; kept my quarters in the morning, trying to distract my mind by reading of a book; and sent Benedetto to make the round of the sentinels, in my stead. Perchance, I told myself, if I did avoid Anita, this impossible passion would subside, suddenly as it had arisen; I would bury myself in reading of the military art. But this was no covetousness of the eye; the book on strategy reminded me of her more than sight, without speech, might have done. 'Twas that she would understand my success in war; or in peace, or in anything else; or, if I failed, my failure; and that her understanding would give to success a value which now it lacked; or remove all bitterness from failure. In a word, she was the key to the problem of life's purpose, so baffling hitherto; a key which was to be withheld from me; the lack of which would leave me hopeless in condition.

Benedetto returned and reported all well.

"Am I to take the evening rounds also, Captain?"

Deliberately, his face was wooden; I longed to ask him if he had seen Anita, though I knew he had, and that he was wondering at my seclusion. I had intended that he should take the evening rounds, and indeed all the rounds until I was calmer; now an inner voice whispered temptingly that he must not be left to wonder; that appearances must be preserved; that the spirit of the men must be kept up by sight of their captain—God, or the blind Fate I have named before, knows what else.

In the upshot, closing my book and yawning, I said I would make the inspection.

I made it; Anita joined me at the angle of the south wall, not asking why Benedetto had been my substitute that day; and though I tried to talk of small things, we walked in silence. Of such kind, that when we came near to that window of her apartments which overlooked the wall, I was trembling violently.

The maid was standing by the open pane; Anita called her to join us, bringing a cloak; and while the wench hastened, we talked again to my old sergeant-cannoneer, as we had done the first day.

"What success with the tent?" asked Anita.

The old fellow saluted.

"We hit it at last, your Ladyship; but without result. My Lord the Count had the good fortune to be elsewhere. We have hit four shelters since, but he has still the pleasure of being alive."

"Try a triple charge," says Anita, laughing; and we continued our walk, the maid some half-dozen paces from our heels.

Well did I know 'twas better so; yet how gladly could I have strangled the wretched woman! And when, suddenly, the countess turned and said she had forgot her purse, how did my heart bound, that she must needs leave us to seek it.

It was a blue and a misty dusk; the sky was like Venitian velvet spangled with stars; and from the enemy's camp there drifted on a soft night breeze the smell of wood smoke; with it, from our own ramparts, the keen death-smell of burned powder. In the courtyard below, there was clanking of armor and the rough rumble of soldiers' laughter, as the relieved guard sought its quarters.

"Return not without it!" Anita called after the maid.

And we were alone, on the battlement above the precipice; shielded by the gloom of falling night; with none nearer to us than the enemy sentry crouching by his fire at the foot of the rock.

"Is it not time to send another messenger to my brother?"

The sight of the sentinel had reminded her, as it had me, of our plight; to which I had given little thought that day.

"I fear there is no use in doing so; if he can not come, sure he will not."

Silence fell; I stared down at the sentry; Anita, her back to the wall upon whose top I leaned, was looking away toward the north tower; we were a sword's length apart, yet I could feel invisible bonds as it were of living silk, springing from her and wrapping me about; I was trembling again, and my heart pounding.

"It grows cold," I said, straightening myself bruskly. "The maid is long gone."

Anita stood upright also; we faced each other, and our eyes met.

"Aye," said she, so softly that I could scarce hear it; and then the purse, for which the maid was searching, slipped from her sleeve, and lay between us on the flags.

At this moment, I can feel the catch of the cold air in my throat, as I drew sudden breath; my hands clenched and my trembling ceased; we said nothing, but looked. Looked.

Until suddenly, Anita bent, and snatched up the brocaded bag.

"Nay," says she, and flung it over the precipice. "Not so."

"What then?" I asked hoarsely.

Still our eyes held.

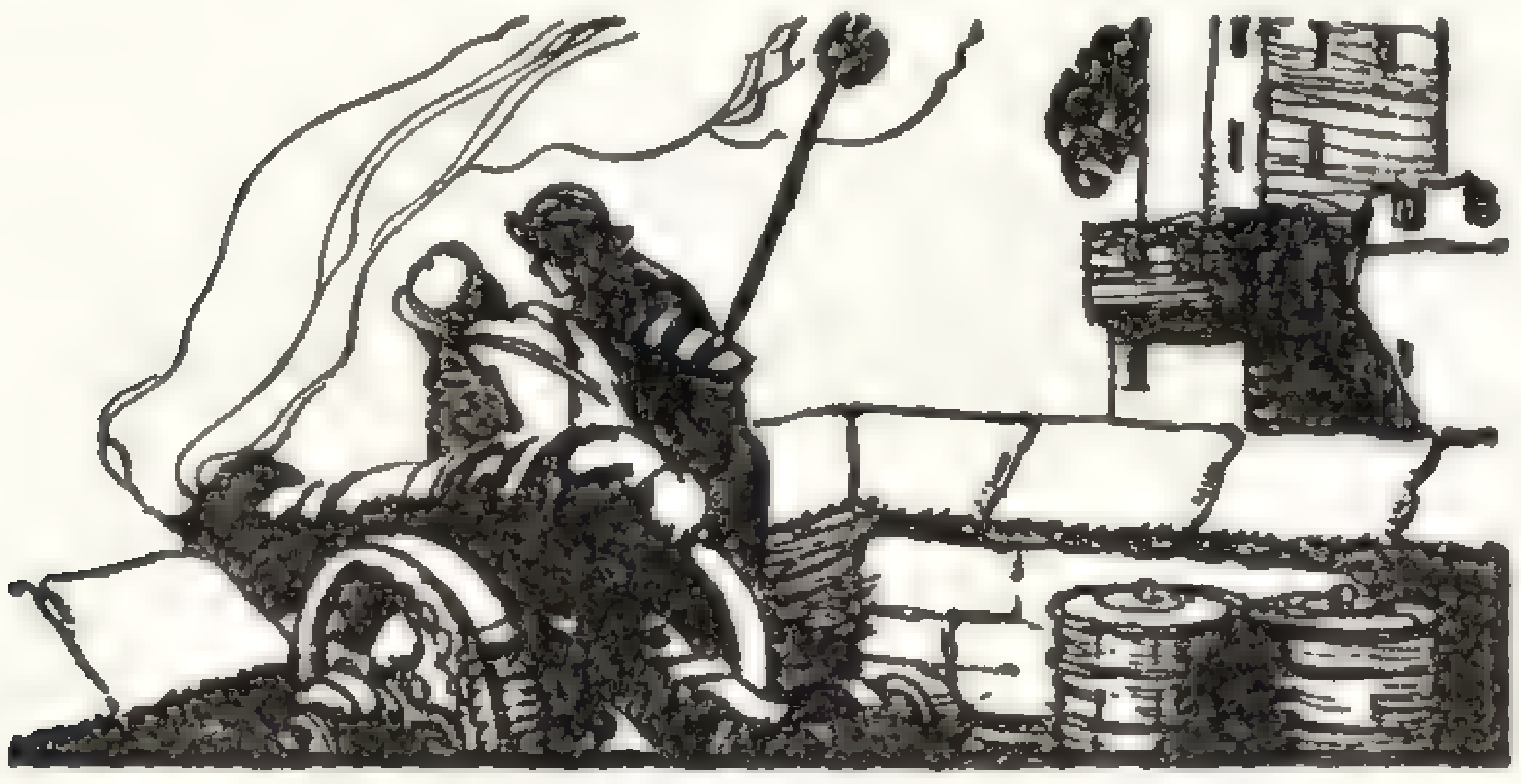
"Sure of all people *we* should not need pinchbeck intrigue," says she. "Why should I pretend I know not what I know: why make love like a whore in a tavern?"

She was breathing heavily; so was I. Now she came close and laid her hands on my mailed sleeve, and looked closely into my face.

"I do know well our situation," she said; and paused. "Francesco, dost thou love me?"

"As my life; thou art—thou art all—"

"And I love thee," she said; and went back to the rampart; I stood still, rooted to the spot until, turning, she began to walk slowly along the wall, and then I followed her.



Up to the angle where the tower marked the turn of the battlement, she moved steadily; but where the moon-cast shadow fell deep-blue across the stones, she stopped, and of a sudden, turned. Her eyes shone in that half-dark with a strange fire.

"Francesco!" she cried in a soft, sweet voice of fear.

And I crushed her in my arms.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH I SWALLOW MY PRIDE

IT WAS nigh a week after, that we found out the desertion of the steward; he had tied a rope to one of the shackles of the precipice-turret and had slid down the same; he, the fearful man that had kept his room since the siege began, for fear of the half-dozen blind balls that might fall in the courtyard daily! And here I do protest against the legend that only great, pure ends to be attained, can force men to prodigies of valor; after some experience both of men and of their prodigies, I do believe the contrary. Sure I have seen some do well enough for loyalty, for gratitude, and for love; give up their lives, even. But the useful desperadoes; the fellows that would attack the impossible, smiling, and not lose their lives either, were those on treachery bent; or after some great advantage for themselves; or, if there was a woman in the case, who lusted rather than loved.

The steward (it was Anita guessed it, when his absence was reported, and the rope found) had from his window espied us together on the battlements; I know not what he had seen—no great matter, evidently; but it was to tell Count Roberto of it that he had risked his trembling life. He was of the folk whose great proverb runs: "Pet the savage dog; the gentle one biteth not;" and Roberto had been more brutal with him even than with the rest of his servants. Wherefore, in the terror which would not let the poor wretch sit still, without some action destined to save his hide, it was to be expected that he would betray Anita to this tyrant; for she had aye been kind to him.

Ah me! No matter; we said it was no matter.

"Were it to have been hid from him," says Anita, her white chin upflung, "I would not have done it. And what is there to hide?"

"He will say, sin," I told her, staring at Roberto's camp, whence a horseman was departing; "and your brother likewise."

She bit her lip at mention of her brother; and burst forth with a vehemence that showed she feared him still.

"Sin? 'Tis they have sinned, my brother above all, in this matter; sinned and lied about their sin. We have remedied their evil, and spoken truth. How then?"

The reply to that, from point of view of the defense of that castle, and of our continuing in this life was that the departing horseman had gone west, toward the country where the duke was embattled; and, had I been alone, such would have been my point of view. The sight of Anita, proud and defiant as flame, her consideration of right and wrong as far above the compromises of life as the heaven is above the earth, shamed me and raised my heart; there was a great flood of joy in me, and I wit well that as I kissed her hand, there were tears in mine eyes.

"Let us walk," says she; and as we went, I stammered something of my unworthiness.

"Ah, Francesco," says she, "it is the woman's part to dream of perfection; the man's to realize it in life; and if the dream doth outstrip the reality, 'tis only because the soul doth outstrip the body. To dream is naught—as I have known these years past; to dream and to carry out the dream as far as may be, is salvation."

"Which we will seek together," says I.

"Which we will find together," says she softly. "Body and soul!"

Indeed, meseemed that theretofore, I had been but a dead man; nay, rather, alive, but without life; moving, but without purpose or direction; conscious, but without consciousness of aught that mattered. I thought, as we walked further in silence, that hitherto I had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, but those fruits that were of Evil, and found them main bitter and of no nourishment. Now was I eating of the knowledge of Good; and though it might kill me, yet did it seem sweet, and strengthening food.

Aye, aye.

Even so was I exalted—to the making of a new botany for the Garden of Eden. I would have rewritten the Scriptures, to accord with her—

For another week, even, trying to rise above my fleshly apprehensions to her state of the spirit (what time the food ran low, and the sentries grew less and less watchful at their posts) I scarce thought of that horseman who had departed from Roberto to the duke; or, if I thought of him, did as sure myself that the duke would not come.

But of course, come he did, horse, foot, and artillery; on the very day after my sergeant cannoneer had at last sent a ball into Roberto's tent and thrown the count fifty paces into a ditch, with the tent-stuff wrapped about him for a shroud. I have since heard that the duke spoke much of his virtue in coming, and more of the Providence that rewarded this virtue, upon his arrival. By this he meant (as regarded the virtue) that, having said he could not leave his campaign when the raising of our siege and the saving of our lives was in question, he had left it readily to safeguard his own renown, which he thought menaced by his sister's conduct. And the award of Providence was this, he thought; that Roberto was dead; the castle therefore his; and that, with his honor for excuse, he could hang me, instead of paying me.

Unluckily, the rôle he was to play, played him; instead of speaking fair words, getting the gates opened, and taking up this matter of *læsa majestas* later (such was my state of spirituality, that I might have believed he was come to raise the siege)—he rode up to the walls with an escort of fifty, and called me a lecherous dog.

This reminded me that I was a soldier, and I answered him reasonably; saying that if he wished to capture me, he must act accordingly; during which action, I should do my best to have him made incapable of such capture. This angered him; because his own speech had lacked reason, asking me to leave my castle, and come and be hanged.

"Then mark me!" yells Alessandro, shaking his fist in the torchlight toward the men-at-arms on the walls. "Your food is almost gone; and if I must stay here and starve you forth, I'll hang every one of your bawds of soldiers! I swear it!"

This was an attempt to sow rebellion.

"And I swear not one of them shall feel the rope," I shouted in return. "Ah, your Highness, if they trust not my oath more than yours, at least, after this last campaign of your Grace, they have more confidence in my military ability."

He had mocked me, years before, on my lack of humor in that matter of Rosa Salviati; yet now, while all the men-at-arms guffawed at my little joke, he himself could not even smile; on the contrary, he snarled, swung his horse, galloped back to the camp; had us bombarded uselessly all night; and, in his rage, forgot to re-post the patrol to intercept messengers, which had ceased its duty in the confusion of his arrival.

So, before another hour had passed, the man that had borne my message to the duke before, was gone with a letter to Matteo Scarlatti.

"But—will Scarlatti come?" asked Anita, as we faced each other in her apartments, over the inkhorn and the scattered paper remaining from my writing.

"He shall come!" says I. "By God, he shall come! Ere now, he hath made overtures for a joining of our bands; he would oblige me, and bring this about. He hath a grudge against the duke; he will enjoy the paying of it. Moreover, 'tis not every day that a castle goes a-begging. With our two bands and this place in our hands, we shall be such *condottieri* as never were before in the world!"

"And then—?"

"With that power in my hands," says I, in a low voice, "and thee beside me, my love, my soul—"

Ah me!

What with planning the future, and safeguarding the present by replying as well as might be to the duke's assaults, we thought little of Matteo Scarlatti, until the messenger returned and said he would not come.

The day of this evil news had been a desperate hard one; the hardest we had had, or were to have, in the whole defense of the castle. For at its dawning, Alessandro had drawn up all his artillery as near our main gate as might be, and begun to bombard it with hollow balls, gun-powder filled, comparable to those I had taught my cavalry to throw, but much bigger; and against this bombardment, I knew neither bridge, portcullis, gate, or bags of earth would stand forever; while our own guns were outranged. One thing alone was to be done, and we did it; while yet the gates stood, I drew up four companies of my infantry in the courtyard, in column facing the gate, and with a score of cavalrymen at their head; another company cleared away the earthen blockade; and then, the gates being opened, the portcullis raised, and the bridge lowered as suddenly as might be, I led a charge on the guns, of which we spoiled all but two by hammering of nails into their touch-holes, at a loss of but seventeen killed, and perhaps fifty wounded.

I do not complain of this affair, though sure that last bomb which caused most of our casualties might have had the troop roster inside it, so cleverly did it pick out and slay my best men; I was never unwilling to pay the price of a necessary success, and the accomplishment of this sortie was cheap bought; but I was in no mood, that evening, to receive news that all effort, this included, had been vain, and that we were doomed to surrender, after all our agonies, as surely as if we had opened the gates at the first demand.

The messenger saw this in my eye, and stammered as that other messenger had stammered, long ago, telling me the news concerning Stella.

"He doth refuse us flatly?" I demanded, scarce believing what I heard.

"Y-yes, your Honor."

The man looked as if he had something in his mind which he would not, or dared not, tell.

"Without condition? Did he not ask money? Did he assign no reason for refusal?"

"He spoke not of money, Captain."

"Of what did he speak, then?"

The fellow fidgeted, and would evidently have been anywhere else than before me. He made no answer.

"Reply, dog!"

Even so, he swallowed a dozen words for every one he spake.

"The Captain Scarlatti—" he began; and stopped.

"Well?"

"Said that formerly your honor had refused alliance—in a manner—in a manner—insulting."

Now I remembered Uccello's returning of Scarlatti's letter on that occasion in the south; it had indeed been insulting, and in no manner either. The memory of it made made me bite my lip.

"Ah! And so—?"

"He said he would not come unless—"

If there was an unless in the case, there was also hope.

"Unless what? Speak, fellow!"

"Unless your Honor in person would come to him, and in person beg assistance in the humblest way. Your pardon, Captain. I told the Captain Scarlatti your Honor would not do so."

"Curse your impudence," I roared at the messenger, "who appointed thee herald and plenipotentiary? What did he say to that?"

"He said, begging your Honor's pardon, that he was well aware on't, and that was why he had set the condition."

Aye, the old fox! That was Scarlatti to an inch; there was never his like, in negotiation; with a case hopelessly in the wrong, he would so evoke the past, present, or future, as ever to gain the victory, and to put his adversary in fault. Here was an example of his ability; for at that time there was a law among free-lance bands—unwritten, but observed all the more for that, though it hath now fallen into disuse—that any was bound to aid any other oppressed by established authority; it was only thus, in most cases, that we could get our pay. This law Scarlatti had not dared to break, much as he desired revenge for that long-past insult; he had not broken it; merely he had set a condition which he could justify to any inquirer, and which yet left me as unprotected before my enemies (he thought) as if he had refused me aid.

"Where was he?" I asked.

"He was in camp at Costecaldo, Captain."

"In strength? Prosperous-seeming?"

"Very prosperous, your Honor."

I bit my lip harder.

"Dismissed," says I, through my teeth and the flesh entrapped therein. "Send the lieutenant to me."

Contrary to all custom and discipline, the man hesitated, not speaking, but staring at me like a deserted dog.

"Well?" I demanded of him angrily.

"Under favor, your Honor is not thinking of—"

I remember I rose, and gripped a great pewter inkwell that stood on my table.

"Begone, rogue!" I shouted, loosing my fury at circumstances, human-wise, on the nearest human head.

"But, Captain, we would rather die to the last man, than that—"

I knew he spoke the truth, so without further delay, I flung the inkwell at him; taking care, however, that it should miss and spread its contents on the wall. It was either that, or a bursting into tears; and if I was to leave the castle at this juncture, as it appeared evident I must, discipline would need all the buttressing it could obtain. Lord, in what state of mind was I, as the poor faithful soldier, fleeing the room ere worse befell, went clattering down the passageway; for to my proper self—I mean the self I had known theretofore—submission to any man living, much more to an avowed rival such as Scarlatti, was as foreign as it had seemed to this one of my following; I will not say this proper self would sooner have been hanged than so bow the knee, because I have seen men's minds change beyond belief when the gallows was in plain sight; but I should have been much of that preference.

My old self, however, was not germane to the case; now I was a new man, compound with the Countess Anita; and my course of action was of necessity different. Formerly, I had lived for myself and for the day then present; now I was living for her as well; and of all the states of time, it was the future which did most engage my regard. Ah me—the future! Of all the snares and pitfalls of this world, I count it the most dangerous, and the most cleverly concealed; I have seen it slay more folk than dagger and poison together; killing moreover the soul along with the body; it is the devil's bait to mankind. "Sin now; now do injustice; abandon at this moment your own opinions of right and wrong, and do what is expedient; and the future shall reward you, and repair what damage you have done." And lo! when the future comes, 'tis nothing new, but another today, with no greater powers of repair or reward than the former.

But as I waited for Benedetto to come, this imaginary time did shine before me brightly, as Anita had illumined it; and so clearly did I see myself risen to power, to honor, to fame and to unspeakable glory and happiness, once this period of humiliation should be past, that only with the eye of my soul (which I blinded as much as possible) did I perceive that, however I rose, whatever the future, the present would remain with me, embalmed in the unchangeable past.

Perhaps it will seem that I make much outcry over a small matter; perhaps in deed it was a small matter in the scheme of the universe, whether I should go prostrate myself before Scarlatti, or remain to live or die with my pride unabased. But to me, it was a great matter indeed; I say so, and I do insist thereupon, that it may be known how great was my adoration of Anita and my faith in her, which vanquished pride and its concomitants on the instant, and determined me, before the messenger had finished speaking, to seek Matteo Scarlatti that very night, cost what the seeking might.

Benedetto entered, and I saw from his face at once, that the soldier had spewed forth his fears and protestations on him also; therefore I saved myself the trouble—nay, the pain—of expounding the intention in so many words. Benedetto and I gazed each other in the eyes for some seconds;

and then, looking at the floor, he shook his head mournfully.

"To say?" I rasped at him.

He looked at me again.

"I have naught to say, Captain," he replied. "You are in command; what you shall decide to do is doubtless for the best. Doubtless."

"Which is better, then," says I, "for all of us to be hanged, or to gain alliance with Scarlatti, and rule half Italy?"

"That is for you to decide," says Benedetto.

He paused, making up his mind to speak further.

"Considering that if we are hanged, we are honorable corpses, whereas in the other event—"

"Aye? In the other event?"

But he would not name dishonor to my face; even in his desperation he stopped at that.

"I mean that save for money, which we spend in taverns and brothels," says he slowly, "all we gain from a life of peril and hardship, Francesco, is the right to carry a flag. Once that flag had been dragged in the mud, meseems our gain would be expended."

"And if we are hanged?"

"We should be expended," says Benedetto, with a sort of stiff smile, "but that which we have fought for, would remain."

This struck me so that I quivered, and could say no more then.

"Neatly argued, Signor Benedetto."

"It is not argued, Captain," says he gravely. "It is but stated as it appears to me."

"Happily," I sneered, "it is not the appearances in your eyes which dictate our action."

He bowed his head.

"I depart this night to seek Matteo Scarlatti; you will remain in command of the castle."

"Alone, Captain, or in conjunction with the Countess Anita?"

There was more in his tone than the words said; he meant that Anita was to blame for this action which he did not approve; that he detested her more than any human being alive, and that he would sooner have accepted a joint command with Judas Iscariot; however, it was by his words alone that he could be answered; and so I said:

"You will carry on the defense as it hath been carried on heretofore; it will be a short trial; for three days should see me back; if not three days, then eternity, and canst make thyself a clean new flag; I bequeath thee the troop."

The poor fellow's face contorted.

"Francesco!" he cried, holding out his hands.

And I looked at him, cold as ice.

"Well?"

Alas, alas! He recovered himself, and turned the twisting of his features into a false grin, and the gesture of his arms into a salute.

"Nothing, Captain," says he; and, when I nodded his dismissal, turned smart about, and went soldierly from the room.

Now I had but two ordeals to overpass—my leave-taking of Anita, and my leaving of the castle; it was to the preparations for this latter that I did first give my attention.

The rope by which the messenger had ascended was still at the turret window, and I gave orders that it should be kept so. It was too late now, and 'twould have been bootless in any case, to command secrecy as to mine errand; as I returned from the turret to vest myself for the venture, I perceived the men of the wall-guard look at me with eyes that announced their knowledge of the plan; their looks were various, as became the diversity of their natures, but I was in no frame of mind to be counting expressions. Only, long afterward, did I remember the eyes of one man, sentry by the cresset to the right of the main gate. He was one of the countess' guard, and I knew him not by name; I had disciplined him somewhat severely ere that, and as I passed, his regard, reflecting the fire above him, glowed red like the ray of a ruby.

Of armor, I had no need; if I were caught, armor would not avail me, if I were not, it would but hamper my speed. A leather jerkin I therefore donned, a cap of red velvet befitting my rank, and hose of doeskin. A cloak I refused, though the nights were cool, and for arms I took but a short sword such as my infantry used—something after the Roman pattern; handy enough to be used as a dagger almost, and heavy enough to split a thick skull with its edge in case of need.

Benedetto assisted at this robing, grave and preoccupied.

" 'Tis not much," said he, at last.

"Naked came we into the world," said I, trying to jest my mind away from the leave which must now be taken.

Benedetto fathomed this intent, as I heard from his tone, when he asked was I now ready to descend the rope.

"In a few minutes," I told him. "Go thou to the turret, and see that all is ready. Is the guard at the foot of the precipice?"

"It was not when last I looked," says my lieutenant, staring at his shoon.

"If it is now, take four or five arquebusiers, and have them ready to distract their attention with firing at them, what time I slide down."

I passed to the door.

"In five minutes, then; have all ready."

And so I went across the court to the apartments of the countess; rapped on the door as was my custom; was admitted by the maid, who forthwith made a reverence and disappeared; and perceived, by the smile with which Anita rose from her couch before the fire, that my wish was granted, and that she was yet ignorant of the business toward. Even at that time, ignorant and infatuated as I was, it was known to me that women take more thought of the manner of any communication, than of its matter; they would rather an obscene song by a sweet singer, than a hymn in a raucous voice; they would be condemned to death by a polite judge, rather than they would be proclaimed Queens of Egypt by a herald that wheezed. Let it not be thought that my trust in Anita was not perfect; only, in this situation, I had fain save her agony, and myself the reflection of it; so that I wished to break the news of my departure in mine own way.

In the first instant she saw my unaccustomed dress, and her smile died.

"It is a small matter," says I, "though annoying. Scarlatti doth demand to discuss the terms of his engagement with me in person ere he will come to our relief. So I go to pay him a visit—it will take me three days at the most; and what I would beg of thee, sweetheart, while I shall be gone, is that—"

She broke in on me, her hands clasped, and the fingers playing about among themselves.

"Francesco, deceive me not. Talk not as if this were a party of pleasure."

"My intention was not so," said I, taking half a step back as she moved forward. "Anita, thou knowest without more words, what this is, and why I do it. 'Tis thou hast shown me the future, and what may lie therein. If Scarlatti come not, there will be no future. Therefore, come he must, and shall. There is no more to be said—except *a rivederci*. I go; soon I shall return."

Her eyes held mine; I made an effort, in accord with my plan, to turn and go, but it was impossible. Her throat was trembling; she put up one white hand to hide it, in vain; and of a sudden, burst forth:

"How if thou art killed? How if thou return no more—no more?"

The next instant, she was in my arms, her smooth silks crushed to my rough leather, her wet cheek against mine, while before mine eyes, fire, candles, and the stars that shone through the windows, seemed to merge into a great blaze of light.

"Do not go—do not go," she sobbed, clutching her soft arm tighter and tighter about my neck; and for some time I could not speak.

"It is necessary," I said at last, "thou knowest it better than I. Come, darling; come, sweetheart; my love."

She still sobbed, but, by a little, her grasp relaxed.

"We are not of the ordinary," I said. "Come, come, I shall return—and triumphant. With thee before me, I can not do less than I do; and I can not fail. Thou knowest our end and aim; this is the way toward it, and the only way. Shall I refuse to take it?"

She turned away, and stood with her back to me, her bare arm across her eyes.

"If thou art killed, I will kill myself that same day," says she, drearily; and against that made I no protest.

"If it is written that I die, it is no matter to me," I said. "For I have lived. Thou hast taught me wherefore I was born; if

I am slain carrying out that purpose, it is well."

There was a long silence, while the fire crackled merrily, absorbed in its own affairs.

"Aye," says Anita at last.

"Good-by."

She swung about, and our eyes met again; but, though some power seemed to be pushing us toward another embrace, we did not move.

"Good-by," says she; and with that I broke from the room running; ran across the courtyard without one glance back at the windows at which (I knew) the white form of my lady would be standing limned against the red glow of the fire; and entered the turret pale and breathless.

Benedetto was there, and four arquebus men; the knot of the rope was fast to a ring in the wall, and its yellow length, sagging across the room in the red light of the torches, disappeared through the narrow window into the darkness without.

"The guard below is not to be seen," says Benedetto dully, while the arquebusiers saluted. "If it is there, it hath no fire."

"If it hath no fire, then I can evade it," says I. "Is the rope fast?"

"We have all pulled at it, without causing it to stir," says Benedetto. "Hath the Captain considered the matter of a horse?"

"Italy is full of them," says I, "and one of my pockets is full of gold. Now it is time my lungs were full of night air— Put out those torches; I would spare you the pain, and any watchers the pleasure, of seeing me go. *A rivederci*, Benedetto."

The torches had been crushed out on the earth floor ere he answered; and then his voice, from the darkness, sounded choked.

"Farewell, my Captain," says he; I was on the window-ledge by this time, with little breath left from the effort of squeezing my shoulders through the aperture.

"That's a sad word, Lieutenant," I gasped. "Count not on command—so—easily. Ah!"

I was out, hanging with both hands to the rope above that black and enemy-filled abyss; happy because (though I did not know it at the time) my mind was too full of this peril, to be turning inward on itself.

I climbed down the swinging thread with as much pain, almost, as if I had been climbing up it; four hands breadths at a time, until my arms ached abominably, and more when I rested than when I continued. The rope seemed interminable; the night darker and more windy than any I had known; but at last, as I swung, my foot struck a jagged point of rock which I knew must be part of the rubble at the foot of the cliff; a moment later I was kneeling on the boulder; and after some stumbling across rough stones, my feet felt the blessed contact of grass.

Above me, the castle towered black against the star-pricked sky; black with a faint halo of rose from the braziers on the three defended walls. Across the plain, the night wind moaned, and the grass under my feet was soaked in dew. For a moment I stood there, staring up at the stronghold I had left; and then, from far away to the right, I heard the *drum-drum-drum* of a horse's hoofs, galloping. Evidently, the patrol; my first instinct was to crouch in among the rocks of the cliff's base, and wait until it should have passed; this was, no doubt, a thought born of the seductive habit, new to me, of fighting from behind defenses; it did not last long. For on its heels came the remembrance that before all, I needed a horse, and the realization that if I could come by the animal now approaching, the duration of my absence from Anita would be shortened by a night at least.

This in mind, I moved carefully in the direction from which the horseman was approaching, straining my eyes into the darkness for sight of him, and praying, as well as I could with my breath held, that he would observe the custom of the patrols, and abate his pace at the foot of the cliff.

He rounded a corner of the rock, and I heard him speak to his mount, as he pulled it to a walk; but at this point did my luck desert me. There was an excess of zeal in the arquebusiers I had left in the turret; and I suppose Benedetto, who should have known better than to exceed orders, was anxious for me; at any rate, just as the rider was within rushing distance of me, out from the window far above leaped four jets of flame, and, a moment later, four heavy reports; while one ball hissed past my head, and other three thudded into the ground.

The fools above had heard the noise of the patrol, even as I had, and the fire had been intended, certes, to distract attention from me, whom they supposed to be still on the rope; instead of which, it nearly cost me my life. For the rider, startled, as was his horse, by this sudden attack, cursed, wrenched on his bridle, drove home his spurs, and launched his horse full speed and rearing in whatever direction God willed—which happened to be straight toward me. I flung myself on the earth to escape the kicking out of my brains; my hands I flung up blindly to ward off the hoofs that were shaking the ground on which I lay; I felt one of my hands grasp something hard and fast-moving; and then there came a frightful crashing thud, and an oath that turned into a groan.

The horse had fallen; by Heaven-sent chance, I had caught one of his fore-legs and made him stumble. In the darkness I could hear his master, clanking in armor and groaning and swearing by turns, dragging out the leg which had been entrapped when the brute fell. Another moment, and the man was on his feet, limping around to the animal's head to raise him; and in another moment I was at the man's throat with my bare hands.

He was too surprized to offer much resistance; I felled him at the first attack; and, as he writhed on the ground, exercised a trick taught me by poor Uccello, who for sport had been accustomed to fight strong men of the command with his fists in the English fashion; doubling up his hands, and striking with the bones of his knuckles. He had found, and had explained to me, that whereas most blows do but produce a bruise and discoloration, one under the chin and a little to the right, will rob a man of consciousness for a half-hour or so; and it was this blow, accordingly, that I dealt the patrol, who forthwith gasped, drew up his legs, and lay as if I had killed him.

I rose (the horse had meantime got to his feet) and listened. There was no more sound of galloping; this man had been sent forth alone; and I remember that in the back of my brain I wondered what devilment the duke might have in mind, thus to be economizing on his patrols. A matter of more import to me then, however, was whether the horse I had captured was still sound in his bones; which, rendering thanks to God, I found was the case; he was frightened and breathing hard (the only sound in the stillness) but he was unhurt, and perfectly fresh; so much so, that it was only after persuasion that I could mount him.

There were pistolets in holsters to either side of the saddle, too; there was bread, and some cheese to boot, in one saddle-bag, and a little flask of wine in the other; I chuckled with a child's delight at these troves.

"*Avanti!*" I cried quite loudly, smacking the horse on the neck; he stepped off; and five minutes later out of chance of pursuit from the camp, I was flying through air that blew in my face at the pace of the gallop, toward Costecaldo.

IT WAS destined that thereafter I should rise very high on the wings of fame and of triumph, as humanity considers height, and as it understands fame and triumph; yet, looking back over the rising and falling road of my life, I do plainly perceive that it was now, on this lonely ride to humiliation, that I ascended the uplands of existence; now, and now alone, that my head was so far raised above earth, as to breathe of the keen, ecstatic atmosphere of the stars.

At the beginning of my journey, Benedetto's opinion, joined to my own doubts as to this desertion of my command, had oppressed my spirit with a load of doubt; furthermore, I was sad at the leaving of Anita, and apprehensive of the coming audience with Scarlatti; but as the night changed slowly into dawn, so did these black moods, swirling in my mind, fuse and transmute themselves by degrees into a strange joy. Of a sudden, my heart bounded; meseemed I was master of the world.

I had Anita; not merely in the flesh, but in the mind, in the spirit; not for this life alone, but for eternity; what then, mattered death? It was in her eyes alone that I should succeed or fail; what, then, were to me the judgments of Benedetto, of Matteo Scarlatti, or of the stupid world at large? I mocked myself of them and of it; for now I had my own universe complete; from which I could sally forth when the need appeared, as it did now; but into which the laws of the common earth could not pursue me. Since I had my mate and my kingdom, I had everything to gain, and nothing to lose; and clearly did I see that against me, no earthling (like Matteo Scarlatti) bound by laws which others had made for their own protection, could long endure.

So for all my mud-splashed leather and for all my lathered horse, it was with the mind of an emperor on progress through his own domain, that I came to the first sentry of Scarlatti's camp; and it was in haughty fashion that, to his challenge, I replied with my name and style; and made to pass him.

He ran, as was his duty, to the front of my horse, placed the point of his pike against the brute's breast; and in a resolved voice that trembled somewhat nevertheless, said that I must wait while he whistled for the guard, which should escort me to the tent of old Matteo.

Coolly, quite resolved, I dismounted.

"Is this, then, the custom with you," I asked, "that a captain of free lances, visiting another, should wait in the rain for a guard, like a bumpkin desirous of turning spy? Ha?"

"It is the captain's order," says the sentry.

"I will discuss it with him," says I, and sprang upon that sentinel.

He opened his mouth to call aid, but had no more time than sufficed him to draw his breath; I struck him between the eyes, and he fell down and rolled; deadly stunned for obeying of his orders, yet I pitied him not. He had withstood me, and I was not to be withstood on this my journey toward the future; he had fallen; it was well.

Now there was Matteo Scarlatti with whom to deal; and as I dismounted at his tent, marked as such by its sentry and the flag at its door, sure enough was I that he would not halt me, either.

This sentry had not the time to challenge; a mist overhung the camp in that gray of the morning; and when I loomed out of it, there was a pistolet in my hand, trained full upon him; moreover, he had seen me before, and the recognition seemed to rob him of his wits. His jaw dropped, and he made a blind motion with his halberd as I vaulted from the saddle; then his eyes met mine, and before he could recover himself, I had passed the curtain of the tent and laid a violent hand on the shoulder of the sleeper within.

"Agggrh!" said Matteo Scarlatti, writhing in slumber (meantime, I heard the footsteps of the sentinel receding at the run). "Awawp!"

I shook him again, and he opened one eye. But it was dark in the tent, to one just awakened, and he closed it again; and he gave a grunt, and wrapped the skins about his shoulders, and as it were burrowed himself into his bed like a coney, with intent to sleep more at all costs. Whereupon, I seized his coverings entire and wrenched them away, and flung them on the floor; exposing his lean and gray-haired carcass naked to the chill air.

Never have I seen such a glare of dazed astonishment on a face, as when old Matteo sat up and stared at me; he was beyond speech, and even beyond thought; so in a few words, I expounded to him the matter at issue between us; whereupon, still eyeing me as might a mathematician the spectacle of two and two making eight, he licked his lips.

"So!" says Matteo Scarlatti; and began to comb his beard with his finger-nails.

This, with him, was a sign of the very worst; as I did not then know, but as, with my exalted wits, I did suspect; moreover, his eyes wandered to the entrance of the tent, as if he awaited aid. Meseemed proper, accordingly, to show him my pistolet; at which, to do him justice, he looked without perturbation; and so we sat for a moment in silence.

He cleared his throat.

"I have seen more of those things, and pointed at me too," said old Matteo at last, "than ever thou hast, young man."

"But the thing to be observed here," I said in a low voice, "is not the pistolet; rather the face of the man holding it. That, by the fact that thou'rt still alive, I do believe thou'lt find unique."

He looked at me; and I thought he was going to smile; but he did not; nay, his face set into lines of high displeasure.

"Is this the way to come seeking aid, Signor Captain?" he rumbled furiously out of the depths of his great chest.

"Aye," I answered him; and beyond a commencement to breathe like a winded horse, he made no reply to that. We sat in silence again, while I wondered why the sentry returned not with the guard. In sooth, the poor fellow, knowing what would be his fate for failing to arrest me, had taken to his heels and fled; neither was he ever seen again by Scarlatti or myself. Of a surety, the stars in their courses were upon my side in this affair; the thought of this lifted my heart so high, that I began to talk reasonably to the old man.

"It is vain that we should be thus situated, Signor Scarlatti," says I, more warningly than pleadingly, "and that we are thus here, in great peril, and wasting time, is the fault of thy vanity. It seemed to thee that there was an insult by a former commander of my troop; be it so. What was the upshot? He did reject alliance with thee, at a time when thou hadst nothing to offer. Now I come to thee, offering great advantages in turn for a little aid, and, like a monkey imitating man, thou must needs do as he did."

"Fine words!" says Matteo, combing his beard more furiously than ever, at memory of Uccello's reply to his proposal. "But by God's bones, young man—"

"To avenge one slight injury, thou dost thyself a greater," I broke in upon him. "For that Uccello, years ago, did seem to treat thee with contempt, thou dost renounce vengeance on the Duke of Rometia; possession of the strongest castle in these parts; and alliance with me; who am not to be despised, even if in this moment, I need help."

"Not to be despised, eh?" sneers Scarlatti.

"Nay; as is demonstrated," said I, "by the fact that here and now hold I your life in the crook of my finger."

He threw up his aged beard and laughed.

"Thou wouldst dare take it?" he mocked, and laughed on and on; I waited until he had ceased; and then, quietly, I said to him:

"I perceive that thou art quite dead to thine own advantage in this matter, Signor Capitano; therefore, I urge it no more, but hear this, concerning myself and this pistolet, which so seem to arouse thy mirth. If, in the latter end, thou dost refuse to come succor my garrison in that castle, I will forthwith spatter thy brains about this room. I beg that this may be believed."

My chin itched at this moment, and I scratched it; now, knowing the mind of man as I do, it is evident that no oath I could have taken would have convinced Scarlatti of my truth, as this did; his jaw dropped a little; and when he closed his mouth again, it was necessary that he lick his lips and swallow something; yet he surveyed me steadily, and at the end, asked a strange question.

"Ah-ha!" says he. "And who is the woman?"

My jaw dropped in its turn; nay, more, the barrel of my pistolet wavered, and I was in two minds whether or not to cross myself. Instanter, from the edge of death, the conversation swung to the midst of life; for old Matteo, delighted as a man can only be delighted by his own cleverness, flung himself backward on the bed, and kicked his heels into the air what time he hugged his old ribs with his hands.

"Ah-ha!" he roared. "He was to shoot me, but by God's bones, 'tis I have shot him. 'Who is the woman?' says I, and lo! God's body and bones, he turneth a bright green. Aha! The old dog is not dead yet. Oho! Aha! Rheumy eyes see farther through a brick wall than bright ones!"

He went on in this manner, wagging his head from side to side and exulting in his perspicacity, so evidently without thought of me and my deadly weapon, that after some time, a kind of hysteria seized me, and I began to chuckle; upon which, Scarlatti laughed the more, though truth to tell, there was no jest that I can now see; and this caused me to guffaw; so that, after a little while, without knowing at what we laughed, we were roaring together, each set off to greater abandon by the explosion of the other. I do not know how long this lasted, but when at last we were driven by the pain in our sides, to control ourselves, we were both weak; and my pistolet lay on the ground at my feet with all the priming spilled out of its pan. Without conviction, I reached to lay hand on my short sword; but as I touched it, old Matteo laid his hand on my wrist.

"Nay, nay, my son," says he, wiping one eye and giving a last chuckle. "Put me not, I pray you, in danger of my life again; I am not what I used to be, and this immoderate mirth doth affect my spleen; I shall be ill all day today. M'm. Ho-ho! But—tell me, is the castle thou mentioned real, or imaginary?"

"It is the castle of the Count Roberto, which now I hold; the count is dead; together we can deal with the Duke of Rometia, who doth at present invest it."

"Ah," says old Scarlatti, "so 'tis the Countess Anita, ha? But no matter for that. The duke, certes, will invest it little longer; I hear that the war he abandoned to come to thee, hath flared again, and will shortly call him away to the defense of his capital. What thou sayest is reasonable. H'm. And as to thy forces, now—what hast thou?"

I told him, to the last man, the last gun, and the last horse, omitting the foolish details which delight republics; and, though he endeavored to show no eagerness, I did perceive that he was impressed by the tale.

"Ah!" says he at last. "H'm. It sounds well. But—as to the countess."

"What of her?" I asked.

"Well," asks Matteo, "is she to be with us? I mean—"

"She is to be with me," I told him. "As for aiding in the command of the troop, of course she will not. She will be no concern of thine."

"Not so fast. If we are together, we are together, young man; my business may suffer from thy faults. Meseems that if thou marry the lady, the nobles will be hostile to thee—to us; and if not, the more so."

"The purpose of this alliance," I told him coldly, "is that at last, and first among all our kind, we may be able to defy nobles, instead of truckling to them; a business which (according to report) doth not much suit thy taste."

This reminded him of the duke; and he tore forth an oath, agreeing that it was even so.

"With such an army as we shall have," I went on, "and with such commanders, we should be nobles ourselves; aye, and higher than that."

"It is possible," says Scarlatti, his eyes lighting, and fixing on me in friendly fashion. "But—this doth not touch upon the countess."

"Your pardon," says I, "but bethink you. When I dared beard you in your own tent, in the midst of your own camp, forthwith it was clear that there was a woman in the matter. Bethink you farther, I beseech; that here you have been more years in the trade than I have lived; yet this thought of commanding nobles, instead of being commanded by them, is new to you."

He considered me.

"Thou wouldst say, that 'tis she inspires thee to such ambition, and that without her—?"

I burst into protestations, the which, after some few seconds, old Scarlatti shut off by placing his hands firmly on my mouth.

"Very well, very well, very well," says he. "In the name of modesty, cease. Quite so. Aye. We will try it, at least; we will relieve your castle, and then we may discuss the alliance more at length."

I gripped the old man's hand until he winced, and demanded when we should start.

"Oh, two days hence," says he carelessly.

"Two days? But in the name of God, man, the garrison is in sore straits! Consider that they are left without me, and—"

"Consider also," says Matteo testily, "that my troop consisteth not of two men and one horse, and that it is in camp, not on the march. I say two days, and that is hastening; if thou dost think thyself able to move the column sooner, why, thou'rt welcome to try."

"Dost thou commission me to make what speed I may?"

His wise old eyes narrowed.

"I commission thee to nothing, waiting the union with thy troop," says he slowly. "But what thou canst do, thou mayest."

I had to stab one man for insubordination; but Scarlatti's band was ready to march by evening of the same day; and leaving Costecaldo for the castle, I perceived the old man eyeing me sidewise, admiringly, as we jingled ahead of the troop.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ROUT

I WAS in the mood to perform prodigies joyfully; left to my command, that troop, accustomed to move slowly and portentously in the old style, would have made a forced march rivaling the best of my own trained men; but when Scarlatti forbade this feat out of pride and on account of the cost of horseflesh, I remained gay, and to his apologies opposed a bland certainty that all would be well. I believed it, to boot; for since my victory over the old man, the kingdom inhabited by Anita and myself had grown walls and defenses, so to say; I was assured that Fate favored us; and had I thought of it, I should certes have furbished up my belief in God, so that I might assure myself that He was on our side.

Overflowing, I said something of this to old Matteo, expecting that he would think me mad, and prepared to laugh inwardly at his own sad sanity; but he was not astonished; nay, it was myself that remained amazed—at his cool understanding of my condition of mind.

"Aye," he said (this was on the second day of our march, when we were near our journey's end), "that is a common error of youth; love gives it an unnatural strength, and forthright it assumes that a similar boon hath been conferred on all creation, natural and supernatural; that planets have gone out of their courses, soldiers out of their natural habits, and that horses' legs have lost the ability to feel tired."

"But—" says I, somewhat stunned by this diagnosis of my state; which, though brutally put, was at least a parody of the truth.

"Aye; and also," says Matteo, having roared out an order for the troop to halt and rest, "every young man in the condition aforesaid doth believe as an article of his salvation, that he is unique; and that though there have been some few paltry passions before in the history of humanity, he hath discovered something new. Ah, go to, Signor Francesco; go to; I am over sixty."

During the beginning part of this strange speech the old man had seemed disgusted with me; now, finishing, he began to chuckle, and was chuckling still as he spurred his mount to make circuit of the halted regiment; we were now almost in the presence of the enemy, and it was prudent he should see that all was in readiness for action. With what disgust did I survey him as he rode away! For he was renowned, as a husband of many wives; I held not this against him, but it turned my soul that from his casual amours, whatever their number, he should pretend to draw experience whereby to judge my love for Anita. As well (I thought) might a newt in a pond presume to talk of Heaven because the stars were reflected in the dirty water. So deeply serious was I in this advice, that when Scarlatti returned, said that all was well, and jested that no doubt I should be glad to advance again, I answered him very coldly; and, when he received my frigidity with chuckles, I could have killed him.

We spoke no more until two hours later; when, turning a corner of the road, we came in view of an armed column—infantry, and strange-looking infantry they were—marching toward us, some two or three hundred strong; at first, as was natural, we thought this an advance party of the duke's besieging force, prewarned of our approach and come to meet us; Matteo Scarlatti combed his beard with his finger-nails, and gave the order to prepare for battle. Already, the company behind us had disengaged lances; already the squadron behind that had left line and swung up on the left of us, ready to desert the road and make a flank attack; already the sergeant of the following company had galloped up to demand orders for his men, when from the distant column there arose a ragged, despairing shout which, thin and forlorn as it was, seemed to beat up to the leaden sky of that dull afternoon, and to fill my universe.

"'Captain! Captain!" wailed the infantry; and, half a mile away, broke into a staggering run. My very bowels froze to see them; they ran not in ranks, not in any kind of order; they became, before my eyes, a mere hastening rabble, some outstripping others, some keeping the road, some burgeoning over into the fields, others stumbling into the ditches, and emerging mud-covered to run again.

"What in the name of God—?" gasped Matteo Scarlatti, staring at this spectacle, oblivious of my hand on his arm, though I was gripping his flesh painfully to mine own fingers.

"Scarlatti!" says I—I can hear my hoarse voice now.

"What is't?"

"Those—those—"

Now he stared at me, and his eyes widened in anticipation of what I should say.

"Those are my men."

The flanking troop was already in position, lances levelled.

"Halt!" bellowed Matteo. "Halt!" And to me. "What then, has happened? Were these in the castle?"

"Aye."

Scarlatti bit his lip, clicked his tongue, and dropped his reins on the neck of his horse.

"Ah, well—" says he slowly, "that are they not now. That—is a pity."

They came on; I sat there on my horse, with Scarlatti's silent force behind me, paralyzed and motionless; and after a time, the first of my men reached me and saluted; a small and negligible fellow with a dirty face and no helmet.

"The castle is taken, Captain!" he gasped, what time some fifty others crowded about, panting and staring at me. "We are all that remain. Some traitor opened the gate from within—one of the countess' guard, we do think; and—and—"

"What of the countess?" I asked; and, beside me, Scarlatti clicked his tongue again, and moved impatiently. Alas, I do avow it; my first thought—my only thought—was for her; of these men who had served me so faithfully, consideration came second.

"The duke took her prisoner," says a voice from the crowd. "Benedetto, the lieutenant, was killed, though."

"And all the rest of you but what are here?" snapped Scarlatti.

"Nay; the duke needed troops, and the most part deserted to him, rather than be hanged."

"And you—?"

"Fought our way out, Captain."

"That was well," says Scarlatti. "That was very well. H'm." He turned to me. "And now, Captain?"

I stared at him with dazed eyes; and on the instant, his hard expression did soften, and he laid a hand on my shoulder.

"If you permit me to command, until such time as the shock has passed," he said in a low voice, "we will go into camp here, and rest the men, and decide what is next to be done. Is that agreeable?"

"Aye. Aye. But—"

He did not wait; he gave the order to his own men at once, and nudged me to tell my own ragged band that they should incorporate themselves with the cavalry, and eat. To his servant, who came up, staring insolently at me, he gave a heavy box on the ear, and the order to erect his tent at once, and to place therein another bed for me.

When this had been done, he conducted me thither, an arm about my shoulders, and commanded a bottle of wine.

"I can not touch it. The countess—"

"Psst!" says Matteo, pouring out a great goblet. "Drink! Afterward, we shall see. No use planning with a man half out of his senses. Aye. That's better. Now—once more. Sit still, now, and let it settle. 'Tis the suddenness of these things that doth dismay; I remember that in a similar case, my first, when I was about thine age, I wept bitterly. There was no wine."

He went on with consoling lies for some minutes; and then, suddenly, as if awaking from a sleep, I started up from the bed whereon I had been sitting.

"But we must act!" I cried. "We must go in pursuit!"

Then I remembered my lack of forces, and stared at him wildly.

"Now, now," says old Matteo. "All in good time."

Upon this (as well as I can remember, and as Scarlatti told me afterward) I did commence to rave; to blaspheme, curse, swear, and behave like a madman; assuring the old man that if this had been a common passion, I would have accepted defeat and ruin as a just blow from God's sword; but that, since Anita was, on the contrary, less a woman than an angel, inspiring me to great deeds for the general salvation of the human race, the calamity which had overtaken and separated us was monstrous, unthinkable, unjust, and a plain assertion of the power of the devil.

"Aye, aye," says Matteo at intervals. "Aye. So. Aye, aye, aye."

I suppose I told him (for I believed it, as I believed all the rest of this delirium) that he could not comprehend the matter, since he knew not Anita, and had never known her like; I declared unto him while he dined —I had no appetite—the story of my early life; to which he responded with much sympathy, and more wine.

Finally, when he was ready to sleep, and I, for the moment exhausted, was pacing up and down the tent, he combed his whiskers for some minutes, and spoke—

"Harkee, Francesco."

He combed again.

"From the time of thy coming to me at Costecaldo, I admired thee; but as thou dost well remember, I was doubtful on this matter of alliance, seeing that thou wert—art—in short, considering this lady who so —er—inspires thee. I am no crusader; I have been in my time, but the time is past; as I have said, I am over sixty. So. Now it doth appear that there is no question of alliance, for that thou hast no troops to bring into the combination; and in some sense, I am relieved. So mayest thou be. For since she is not to come interfering with me and my present mode of carrying on my business, I'll help thee find the lady, and take her from the duke. That will avenge me on him more than the holding of a castle, whereof he hath some dozen; it will reward thee for coming pointing a pistolet at me in the midst of my own camp; and it will not embroil me with the nobility, my employers. How now?"

"But where is she?" I demanded, feeling my heart lighten nevertheless

"If the duke hath been called away swiftly to a war, as surely he hath," says Matteo, "he will most like have immured her in a nunnery to await his return; the country is thick with religious houses hereabouts. I'll send out men to inquire—send them this very night. Does that comfort thee?"

I took his hand, in silence; and he looked at me as he might have looked at a mirror of his own youth; I see now that that was indeed his occupation; he said nothing, but pulled his hand away and slapped me on the shoulder.

"Pity thou'rt all for love, and naught for this wicked world," says he, walking toward the tent flap, "it is a pleasant place, taken just as an affair of brown earth, green leaves, and red wine— Ho, sentry!"

"Aye, Captain."

"Call me a dozen men, well mounted, as scouts," says old Matteo; and, turning back into the candle-light of the tent, stood smiling at me strangely, and shaking his head.

"Aye, aye!" says he, pouring out more wine for himself. "Aye, aye!"

CHAPTER XVII

OF MATTEO SCARLATTI

IT WAS not long that I remained in my daze; it had been occasioned by utter perplexity as to what next might be done. It lightened, as I have shown, with Matteo's offer of aid; and it disappeared altogether when, on the second day, a scout returned saying that while none knew the whereabouts of the Countess Anita, he had found, ten miles away from the Castle Impregnable, a nunnery guarded by a troop of Rometian horse.

"Ah-ha!" crowed old Scarlatti. "Said I not so? This is very well. One troop, ha? Of what sort?"

"Of the duke's guard, Captain."

"Certainly, then, 'tis there he hath deposited her. So, now, Signor Francesco, thy business is easy done. What now, fellow?"

"Under favor," says the scout, saluting, "the place is a religious house, Captain."

"Well? I heard thee. What of that?"

The man's eyes wandered.

"Nothing, Captain."

Scarlatti considered him.

"Oh," says he to himself. "H'm. Dismissed. Send the lieutenant to me."

When we were alone, the old man combed his beard.

"We march at once?" I demanded, rising.

"M'm—yes."

"What is the drawback?"

"Well," says Scarlatti, after a pause, "I am reminded by—in short, I am reminded by that scout's hesitation, of a fool vow I made a month or so agone; 'tis naught to me, of course, but it may be much to the soldiers— In any case, what infantry thou hast should be capable of dealing with one troop."

"What was the vow?"

"Why, when I announced to the duke my intention of leaving him, t'other week, I found he had run a battery of guns into position during the night, and given the cannoneers orders to fire into us if we moved westward. My lieutenant is a superstitious ass, and said 'twas a judgment for a little business we did with a monastery once; and in the heat of the moment, I swore never to touch another property of the Church, so be we got out of the mess. Sure enough, the night dews had wetted the powder— Not, you understand, that I believe in—"

"But thou believest the men will not attack?"

"They'll attack if I so command them," growls old Matteo, the veins in his forehead swelling at the thought of disobedience. "Only— Look you, Francesco; I appeal to thy sweet reason; they will obey, but it will be with a strained obedience, and future command will be difficult. Thou knowest, eh? Very good. Under the circumstances—"

"Yes, yes," says I.

"'Tis not as if the benefit to be gained for thee were of a negotiable kind," pursues the old man, writhing his shoulders in embarrassment. "If I could go to the troop, and say to them, 'See; here is a brother in distress; he needeth money, or horses or arms, or such things; shall we not—'"

"God forbid, in the first place, that I should come before soldiery as a brother," says I, rising. "Much less a brother in distress. It is not my habitude to beg, Signor Matteo Scarlatti—as thou shouldst remember."

Matteo arose likewise, and laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Poor boy," says he. "I'll do my best."

I felt my pride rising to flood within me; also, my grip on the world had been taken again, and it was tightening from moment to moment.

"There will be no need for any straining of thy discipline," I told Scarlatti. "After the assistance thou hast rendered and for which I thank thee, Signor, I can deal with this matter myself. My infantry is capable, if it is not too shattered. One further favor I will ask, however—on account of its recent hard experience."

"Aye?"

"That thy forces may accompany us as far as this place; the company will cheer my men, and when time comes to attack, 'twill seem merely that they are detached from the main body, instead of being alone with the fight."

Scarlatti nodded. He also sighed with relief; I perceived that for all his contempt of the troop's superstition, he had rather not lift hand against the nunnery himself; or its guard either.

"That is clever," says he, "there is a great captain—er—"

"Lost in me, thou'd say," I told him, as he caught the words between his teeth and began to comb his beard again. "Signor Matteo, thou deceivest thyself; the future will show. I have lost a few men and a few guns. What are they? 'Tis not the men, or the guns, that make the army, as well thou knowest; but the spirit of the commander. And that—"

"Aye," says Matteo, "and mark you this, Francesco, which thou knowest not yet—that it is not the woman that maketh the spirit of the commander, but the commander's belief in the woman." Then he murmured the words he had used before—

"Go to, go to! I am over sixty."

He was smiling as he turned back again, however; so genial, in fact, that he invited his lieutenant, who entered at that moment, to drink with us.

"We are not to attack the place," says he to this latter. "Captain di Vitali, here, doth charge himself with that business, since 'tis for his benefit alone."

"And, doubtless, he hath no vow," says the lieutenant, sighing into his wine-cup so heavily that it cost him a stained doublet.

"Only to the contrary of ours," says Matteo. "It is a question of—"

"Of starting at the earliest possible moment," I broke in, unwilling to have this stranger wink, or otherwise show his opinion that this was a common abduction.

"Precisely," says the lieutenant, looking at Matteo. "Shall I, then—"

"The case is thus," Matteo informed him. "Captain di Vitali feels that his men would fain have our company, on the road. They are smallish in numbers, and have lately—"

"Aye," says the lieutenant. "But—only on the road?"

"Your horse can stay half a mile away, if they desire," I broke in angrily. The lieutenant considered the inside of his cup.

"A mile would perhaps be more—"

"Who asked for thine opinion?" burst forth Matteo Scarlatti. "Get hence, and have the troop in marching order as soon as may be! Thou and they will halt where I command—and fight, too, if I wish it! A mile, forsooth! By God's body, such an intrusion on a discussion between captains I never did hear. Hence, hence!"

When the man had gone, I thanked the old man for this defense of me. He was struggling into his armor, and I helped him.

"'Twas nothing," says he in a grunt. "I do perceive, Francesco, that thou hast the wit, and would have the will, to do likewise for me, were the positions reversed; which please God they may never be. 'Tis not often one finds a born captain such as thou; most of the free bands nowadays are commanded by tailors. Loosen that last buckle, I implore thee— Ah!"

He turned and held out his hand.

"I do from my heart wish thee success," says he doubtfully.

And so (after he had provided me with armor from his own store) we departed.

We reached the neighborhood of the nunnery just as the voice of the convent bell, quivering across the misty fields, announced the hour of the angelus.

TO BE CONTINUED

The APOSTLE

A struggling little newspaper and the Law

By John Webb

DAVE ELLERS, a miserable, cowardly braggart, shot Tom Campbell—shot him in the back. Dave had remarked on the fecundity of the Anchor-O cows, and had suggested that some of the baby cows must have been adopted, so to speak. It was like Dave to say a thing like that, and he said it out loud, and didn't laugh; and it was like Tom Campbell, who with Frank Jessup owned the Anchor-O, when the talk came to him, to walk into the Mirror Saloon and plant his fist against Dave's jaw.

Well and good; Dave was a no-good son-of-a-gun and much too loose with his tongue, and no one was sorry to see him lying there on the floor with his head in a spittoon. But then Tom Campbell made a mistake; he forgot, or possibly didn't know, that it is far safer to turn one's back upon a brave man than upon a coward.

Firing from the floor, Dave put a .45 slug between Tom's shoulder blades. Afterward, he said he had been still half dazed from the blow and had thought Tom was facing him with a gun in his hand, but nobody paid any attention to that; they knew Dave Ellers. Just in time to save Dave from being drilled in turn by one of Tom's friends, Sheriff Augie Underholtz came along; he disarmed Dave and locked him up.

Little Tim Wiley, editor, owner and everything else of *The Prairie Flower*, which came out once a week—usually—was seen to shake his head sadly as Augie went by with his prisoner.

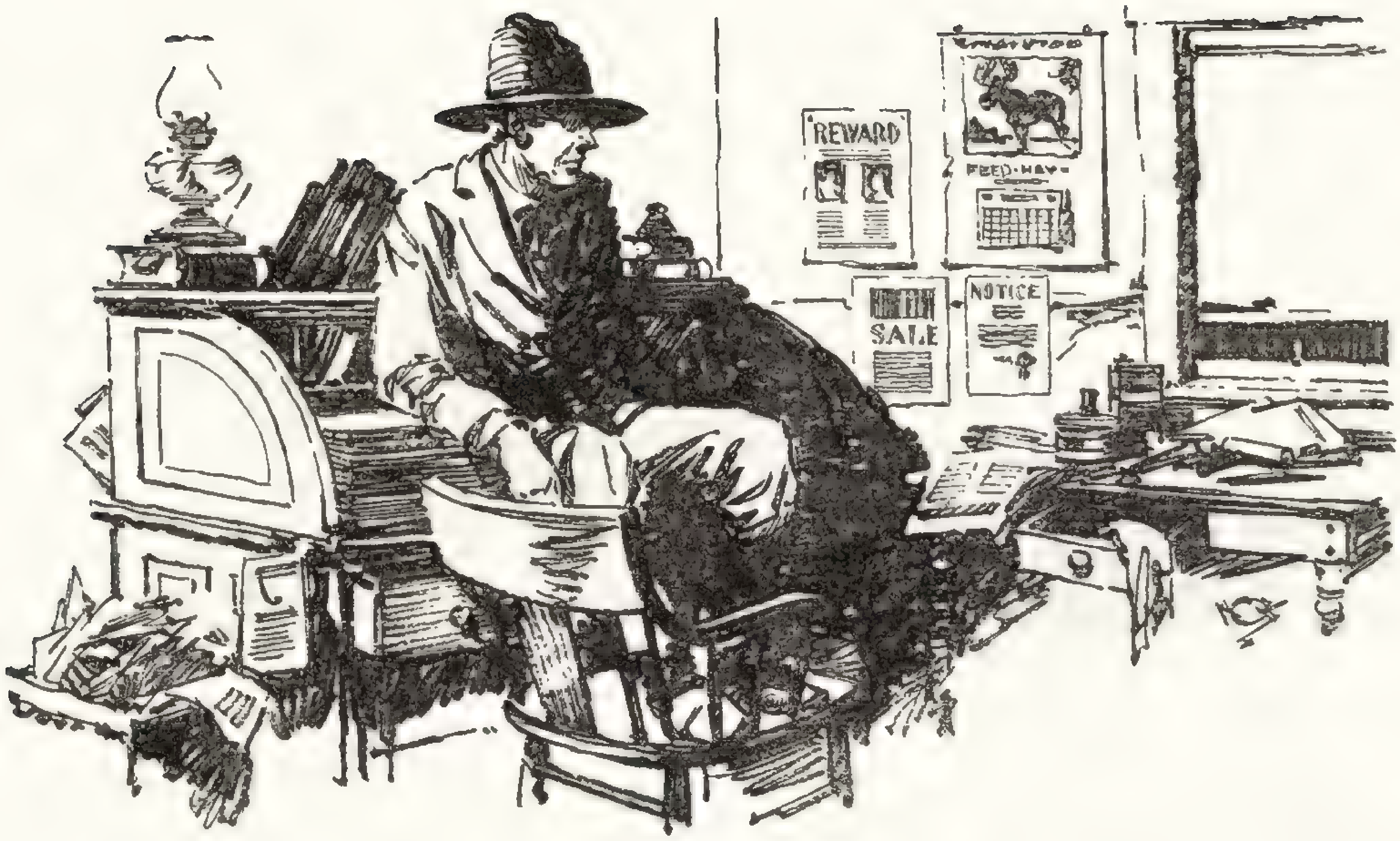
"Another setback," Tim mourned to Jake Sarney, bronc peeler of the Anchor-O. "Law and order's comin' creepin', creepin', and every once in a while some relic of the barbarous past comes along and puts a spoke in the wheel."

Mixed metaphors meant nothing to Tim Wiley; which, perhaps, was one of the reasons why he was a durned good editor. Another reason was that when he had anything to say, he said it; he didn't go dodging and ducking and mixing things up with a lot of "alleges" and "it is saids" and nonsense like that, like a lot of them Eastern editors do.

Tim Wiley wasn't too particular about spelling, either; at least not too particular. For instance, what was the difference whether a word like, say, "necessary" was spelt with one *s* or two? If a man could really read and wasn't a darn fool, he could understand it if it was spelt with a dozen *s*'s, couldn't he? Tim wasn't one of these here pedantists; he often said so himself.

Young Jake Sarney, standing there watching the sheriff go down the street with Dave Ellers, snorted disgustedly.

"Law an' order? Humph! Law an' order 'n' yeller-livered mongrels who shoot good



men in th' back—yeah! Me for th' good ole days!"

Jake was twenty-six.

Little Tim shook his head. He blinked his eyes behind the green-tinted sun-glasses that he always wore. He rubbed his lean, clean-shaven brown cheeks thoughtfully.

"Jus' the same," he said, "she's a-comin', old law an' order is."

"You kin have it," growled young Jake, and strode away.

That night a dozen old-timers met in the room above the Mirror Saloon. Tom Campbell's partner, Frank Jessup, was there, and the others all had known Tom well. They looked mighty grim as they thought of poor Tom, who had always been as square as a die and who had always had a few extra dollars to spare for whoever needed them.

Shot him in the back, too! Whatever the rule was in other parts, in Sunbake it wasn't considered good ethics to shoot a man in the back.

"Well," said Frank Jessup, "it ain't a case of there bein' any doubt about it. We know who done it and how, because everybody in the bar seen it. What're we goin' to do about it?"

"Stretch his neck!" growled old Mike Sloan, who was foreman for the Triangle-T. "What's the use o' beatin' around th' bush?"

"Ain't none," agreed another, and the rest nodded. The penalty for murder was hanging, wasn't it? There wasn't a doubt in the world that Dave Ellers was guilty, was there? Well, then!

The door swung open and young Jake came in, a copy of *The Prairie Flower* in his hand. Little Tim Wiley had managed somehow to get out an extra; or rather, had put the regular weekly edition out two days ahead of time. Jake slapped the paper angrily on the table.

"Look what's in this thing he calls a paper!" he snorted.

It was, indeed, a sorry sheet; funny, even, did one not consider the mental anguish in which each edition was conceived and born. Tim worked hard over that pitiful rag; nursed and petted and loved it as a mother loves a malformed child; a sickly child whose life hangs by a thread. *The Prairie Flower* was the first paper in this part of the State, and its future was doubtful—very.

"My gosh!" gasped Frank Jessup. "Look here!"

DASTARDLY CRIME COMMITTED;

ANOTHER BEING PLANNED.

Tom Campbell Shot in Back;

Dave Ellers to be Linched.

"My gosh!" gasped Frank again. "Th' little shrimp!"

Before they could read further, Jake

opened the paper and pointed out an editorial flanked by a patent-medicine ad and followed by an article clipped from some healthier sheet, on the prevalence of polygamy among certain South Sea Islanders.

> CIVILIZATION OR CHAOS?
>
> As this issue goes to press certain of our citizens are assembling to plan a linching—a murder. They are not bad men but they haven't much sense, and if they are not stopped they will become bad men and will drag a lot of others along with them. They will sully the fair name of our beautiful community.
>
> We know the names of those men, and if they persist in their attempt to do what they are planning to do we will publish the names and make them known from coast to coast.
>
> *The Prairie Flower* sounds a warning:
>
> Citizens, *Obey the law!*
>
> Sheriff, *do your dutie!* You, Augie Underholtz, *enforce the law!*
>
> Would-be Linchers, go back to your honest laber. *Stop! Think!* The inikuitous days of the passed are *gone!*

"Why, th'— th'—" Frank Jessup choked, gagged; almost foamed at the mouth. "Why— publish our names, will he? The little runt!" His big pearl-gray sombrero on the back of his head, his fists on his hips, he glowered at the paper on the table. "Le's go talk turkey to that wahoo!"

"An' talk it with a fence rail and a tub o' tar," put in another rancher.

"Not so fast," advised old Mike Sloan. "Le's think."

Young Jake Sarney snorted scornfully. "Feet ain't cold, are they, Mike?"

Old Mike whirled, his hand on his gun. Then he clucked with his tongue and shook his head.

"If yuh wasn't still in knee pants," he said, "I'd think you meant that 'n' gun-whip yuh over the head. Go over there in th' corner 'n' set down, little boy, 'n' let the men talk this here thing over."

Jake looked around, saw the expressions on the faces of the other old-timers and subsided, abashed.

Mike had something to say. He told them he didn't want any harm to come to little Tim. Tim was a good little coot, in his way. Had a lot of funny ideas, but he wasn't the only one.

Mike considered. Despite his age, he was a big man, and powerful. He wore a battered sombrero, a blue cotton shirt with a red silk neckerchief, and heavy leather chaps; oily, scarred chaps studded with copper rivets. A long gray mustache drooped down over his jaws, and when he was in thought, as now, he tied all sorts of knots and hitches in the ends.

"Wal, I dunno," mused Mike. "We sure gotta stretch Dave's neck, but I don't wanta see Tim get hurt 'count o' him printin' any names."

"Me 'n' Tom Campbell was good friends," put in Jud Mace, of the Diamond-Bar."

"Me, too," added another.

"He helped me out when th' bank turned me down on a loan," added still another.

"Me 'n' Tom was friends 'n' pardners near twelve years," said Frank Jessup. "No wahoo kin shoot a friend o' mine in the back 'n' get away with it."

"He ain't gettin' away with it," said Mike; and added simply, "Me 'n' Tom slep' under th' same blanket many a time. Le's go talk to Tim."

TIM WILEY sat alone in the disheveled little room which he called "our office," the combination editorial and business office of *The Prairie Flower*. The room behind this was the "press room." Up stairs was small room in which was a bed and a wash-stand and a single chair; here Tim slept. He wanted little here on earth, did Tim, and got just that.

Tim sat on the edge of an old-fashioned roll-top desk, leaning with one arm on a stack of perhaps two dozen copies of *The Flower*. His stiff-brimmed felt hat was pulled low over his green-tinted spectacles and his shiny blue coat was buttoned tight across his chest. And beneath Tim's coat an old-time single-action .44 with a monstrously long barrel was strapped tight beneath his arm.

Tim was waiting.

After a while he got up and moved to the door. The glare from the Mirror Saloon, across the street, fell upon his lean brown face, with its high cheek-bones and the patch of gray hair at each temple. Standing there, gazing into the street, he seemed to be struggling with some mental problem; seemed also worried, a little fearful.

Across the street a piano banged. A woman sang shrilly. Here and there along the foot-high board sidewalks loitered groups of men, talking in low voices. A group of cowpunchers from the Anchor-O thundered up to the Mirror. They took off their spurs, hung them on the pommels of their saddles, slid from their ponies and crowded into the saloon. The piano stopped and the singer trailed off into silence.

Out of the Mirror came a dozen men. They stepped into the street and headed for *The Flower* office, dry dust swirling from their high-heeled boots.

Tim drew back into his office, lighted only by the glow from the Mirror. He jerked himself erect and drew a deep breath, as if preparing to face an ordeal that he dreaded.

The men were at his door now. Old Mike Sloan and Frank Jessup appeared in the doorway, the rest close at their heels. Frank Jessup, the paper in his hand, advanced into the room.

"Hello, boys!" Tim greeted them. "Thought you'd be over to see me."

"Huh?" Frank stared at him.

"Sure," said Tim. "I knew you wouldn't go an' do this here thing you been talkin' about once you thought it over. You boys ain't goin' to trample down law and order—"

"Law and order ——" barked Frank. "Look here, Tim, yuh gotta keep out o' this, d'yuh hear? We ain't got nothin' against yuh, Tim, but we ain't gonna let yuh interfere with us handin' out a little justice."

"Law an' order—"

"Be ——! Don't be a fool, Tim. We all kind o' like yuh an' like *The Flower*, too, even if yuh are always shoutin' about law 'n' order. We want law 'n' order, too, same as you do, but in this here case justice comes first. You keep out."

Old Mike Sloan stepped forward. Tim looked up at the big foreman. They were about the same age, but Tim seemed withered and tired, while Mike was still bluff and hearty and full of energy.

"Frank's right, Tim," said Mike gently. "Justice comes before law 'n' order. Law 'n'—"

"Seems like we're doin' a —— of a lot o' talkin'," broke in Jake Sarney, the young bronc peeler.

"Any time yuh feels like changin' the procedure, Jake," said Mike, "jus' snap to it." He turned back to Tim. "Law 'n' order's all right, Tim, but then again it ain't so right. First thing we know, if we keep gettin' more peaceful all th' time, we'll be like them folks back East, where yuh can't step outside th' house without some feller puttin' a bullet in yuhr belly. Yuh're liable to get shot in th' back just as like as not, an' they don't care whether yuh got a gun on yuh or not."

The others fidgeted, but old Mike talked on, his gruff voice strangely gentle. A man ought to be given a chance to defend himself, and if he got shot in the back, with no chance to fight, it was up to his friends—up to everybody, in fact, said Mike—to make an example of the dirty, low-down polecat. Who knew who would be the next man to get drilled when he wasn't looking, or even when he was asleep? Eastern people didn't mind murder much, maybe, but out here it was different. A killing was one thing, but murder was another.

In the past, down Texas way, went on Mike, things were different. There were plenty of killings, but they stood face to face and shot it out. Promiscuous shootin' was bad, but murder was worse.

"I knew Soda Jones when he was at his worst, but he never shot nobody in th' back. Knew Kid Bart, too. Yep." Mike nodded slowly, and tied another diamond hitch in his long mustache. "Knew him when he was holdin' up stages 'n' trains 'n' then hoppin' away like a musketeer. Slipperes' man yuh ever heard of. Dangerous, too; nobody wanted to tackle him. Finally they caught him 'n' give him twenty years."

Mike put another hitch in his mustache.

"I was there when the sheriff started off to th' penitentiary with him. Somebody slipped the Kid a gun 'n' the sheriff seen it. He says, 'Gimme that gun,' 'n' shoves his own gun at the Kid. Kid Bart takes his gun out careful-like, 'n' holds it out butt firs', 'n' the sheriff reaches out to take it. The sheriff kind o' lowers his own gun then, like a feller will do when he reaches out fer another one. An' then Kid Bart's gun twirls around his hand like it was a live snake, an' 'fore yuh could wink he had th' sheriff covered. Never seen nothin' like it. A minute later Kid Bart was on a horse 'n' hittin' fer Mexico. Got clean away, 'n' they ain't never caught him. Fifteen years ago, that was.

"Yep. Kid Bart was bad. But he never shot nobody in th' back, Tim."

"I heard about that gun-twirl o' Kid

Bart's," commented one old-timer, "but I never seen him. Wish I had."

"There was on'y one man could do that trick like Kid Bart could," said Mike, "an' that was Kid Bart himself."

"But what's all this got to do with hangin' Dave Ellers up by th' neck?" asked Jake Sarney impatiently. Being an old-timer twenty-six years old, Jake wanted action.

"Yuh're right for once," agreed Frank Jessup.

"Listen, boys," said Tim, "don't go goin' off half-cocked now. You want to kind o' think this out—"

"We ain't goin' off half-cocked," growled one. And he was right. These old-timers were going about this matter very coolly and very thoughtfully; they were not a hot-headed, reckless crowd acting on the spur of the moment. They had thought this thing out thoroughly, and their decision was final.

They had considered letting the law have its way with Dave. But the law was slow—and uncertain. Law sharks did queer things. And Frank Jessup had pointed out that a smart lawyer could make Dave's case look pretty good. Suppose he should ask for a change of venue, and get it? A jury that didn't know the facts of the case, Frank reasoned, would look at it differently, maybe. Tom Campbell, be it remembered, had struck the first blow. He had knocked Dave down. Maybe Dave's plea of self defense would go pretty good with a strange jury.

No, sir; no leaving Dave to the law. He deserved hanging till he was dead—dead—dead. These old-timers had handed out justice in the past—rough, quick justice, but real, devoid of frills and furbelows—and they felt that they were still competent. Certainly they knew how to hang a man from a cottonwood-tree.

"Yuh're goin' to keep out o' this now, ain't yuh, Tim?" said Mike urgingly.

Tim shook his head. He was for law and order; always had been and always would be, he told them. They all knew Tim; a mild, kindly little coot who never bothered anybody and was always ready to go out of his way to do a favor. They liked him; just the same, he couldn't stand in the way of justice—of their idea of justice.

"Boys," said Tim, blinking at them from behind his glasses, "you'll be sorry if you do this thing. It's a awful thing to kill a man, boys. It gets on your mind an' you can't forget.

"I don't want to cause any trouble, boys. I don't like trouble. But I'm goin' to stand pat on this." He placed his hand on the stack of papers beside him. "I only let one of these get out; I gave it to Jake, knowin' he'd go to you with it. Then I thought we could kind o' talk it over an' call this here lynchin' off. But I guess you won't listen to reason," he said sadly. "But listen to me now!" His jaw squared a little. "If you go through with this lynchin', I'm goin' to put every one o' them papers out and run off some more, an' t'morrow I'll get out a extra with all your names in it! I will! I don't like to do anything like that, but you're forcin' me."

"Yuh're mind's made up, is it?" said Frank Jessup.

"Yep; an' nobody can change it, Frank." Tim's whole bearing was one of dogged determination. He was standing pat on a matter of principle, fighting in his own way for an ideal.

Frank Jessup suddenly reached out, snatched the thin stack of papers and passed them to the man behind him. A moment later the papers were torn into scraps.

"If yuh think anything of that press o' yourn," said Frank angrily, "give us yuhr word yuh won't print any more about this thing."

But little Tim wouldn't promise any such thing. He wagged his head firmly, pressing back against the desk. Three men strode angrily into the rear room. Then there came the sound of his beloved old hand press being smashed to scrap iron, and of type being dumped from the case. Ink fumes floated out to them as a barrel of ink was capsized on the floor.

Tim wilted. He slumped down upon the desk. His hands trembled. His arms swung at his sides like lengths of lifeless rope. He stood there, his head hanging, a picture of utter weariness and dejection. He had become suddenly an old, old man, bowed down beneath the weight of the awful thing that had happened. He had not forgotten the gun beneath his arm, but that was for the protection of law and order; not for the protection of Tim Wiley and his newspaper.

"Boys," he faltered hoarsely, "I didn't think you'd do this to me. I came here years ago, when this town wasn't no more'n a few shacks, with the desert all around. I stayed here and worked. I helped build this town. Boys, don't you know that a newspaper is a sure sign of the coming of civilization? You've done a bad thing tonight. For yourselves more'n for me. And for the town. I planted this paper here in the desert, and brought it up—*The Prairie Flower*—"

"Flower, ——!" cut in young Jake. "Weed, yuh mean! An' now we cut th' dirty weed down—"

"Shut up!" snapped Frank Jessup. This was no time to jeer. All their hearts went out to Tim. But it had to be done; it was tragic, pathetic, but necessary. Old Mike wet his lips and stared aimlessly around, avoiding Tim's eyes. The others shifted uneasily.

Frank Jessup said gruffly:

"Didn't wanta do it, Tim, but yuh wouldn't promise. We can't have our names sent all over th' county, an' maybe copied in some o' th' big city papers. Now you—Grab him!"

Too late. Little Tim Wiley was gone. Frank Jessup leaped to the open window in time to see his coat tails whisk around a corner.

THE sheriff, Augie Underholtz, was worried. He knew the rumors that were going around, and knew they were well founded. A crowd was coming to get Dave Ellers. And not a crowd of wild-eyed young punchers, either; but grim, determined old-timers; men like Augie himself.

Augie wasn't a coward. He was a good sheriff, and would-be bad men in these parts had found him a tough customer. Nevertheless, he didn't relish what was coming.

It was too bad, he told himself, that good men had to fight over a yellow-backed animal like Dave Ellers, in there trembling in his cell. One thing was certain—Augie's heart wouldn't be in it.

There came a sudden hammering at the door, and Augie, gun in hand, called out—

"Who's that?"

"Me— Tim Wiley! Open up, Augie!"

Augie unlocked the door and the little editor burst in.

"They're comin', Augie," he panted. "Mike Sloan an' Frank Jessup an' Jud Mace an'—"

"Yeah." Augie nodded. "I been expectin' 'em, Tim."

"Where's Sam?" Sam Cavanaugh was Augie's deputy.

"Won't be back till t'morrow mornin'. I sent him over to Loadstone to bring back that feller that run off with a couple o' Triangle-T hosses. Just th' way things happen."

"This is bad, bad, Augie!" Tim sighed deeply. "I tell you what, Augie; you make me deputy. I'll help you hold Dave. Can't let 'em take him away, Augie. Law an' order—"

"Yeah." Augie sucked in his lower lip and squinted at Tim. "Ain't never seen yuh handle a gun, Tim. Kin yuh handle one?"

"Some, Augie. I got a gun here." He held open his coat.

"H'mm," murmured Augie. First time he'd ever known Tim to pack a gun.

The sheriff reached into the drawer of his desk and brought out a shining star. He pinned it on Tim's coat, thereby making him deputy sheriff of the town of Sunbake.

Augie put out the light in the office, then went to the window and looked out. Across the street a small group of men had gathered, their faces turned toward the jail. Another group had formed a little way down the street. The whole town, it seemed, knew what was in the wind, and most of them were heartily in agreement with the friends of the murdered Tom Campbell. Many of them would join the old-timers.

The jail, Augie knew, would not withstand a determined assault. It was a frail building barely capable of keeping in a half-dozen men, much less of keeping out a half-hundred angry citizens led by such grim old frontiersmen as Mike Sloan and Frank Jessup. So Augie was in a quandary. Were the coming men young punchers, Augie would have known just what to do; he would have met them at the door, grinned at them, cracked a joke and got them laughing; then he would have invited them all to the Mirror for a drink. Wild young colts with the bits between their teeth were easy for Augie.

Boots sounded on the board walk outside. Lanterns flashed. A voice called:

"Augie! Open the door!"

Augie glanced out the window. There

was a small crowd before the door, and the crowd was growing as other men came from all directions. Feeling ran hot against Dave Ellers and many men had been merely waiting for some one to take the lead. Now here they were, figures shifting in the lantern light, waiting for Augie Underholtz to open the jail door and let them take the murderer of good old Tom Campbell.

"Come on, Augie!" A revolver butt thudded on the door. "Open up!"

Augie looked at Tim. The little editor was standing dejectedly in the center of the room, an uncertain look in his eye, and Augie told himself he couldn't expect much help from his temporary deputy. Tim didn't lay claim to being a fighting man; in the fifteen years he had been in Sunbake, no one had ever known him to talk fight; just the opposite, in fact.

"Go talk to 'em, Augie," advised Tim. "Talk law an' order, Augie. They ain't—ain't—"

"Th' —— they ain't!" growled the sheriff. But he moved to the door and placed his hand on the bolt. He didn't want to shoot any one if he could help it. There was a faint chance that he could talk reason into them. And anyway, if he didn't open the door they would break it down.

"Stand away from that door!" he shouted. "I'm comin' out, an' I want yuh all to stand back!"

"Come on, Augie," answered a voice. "Le's have a look at yuh."

He heard them move away and opened the door. Then he stepped out, Tim close at his side. The crowd of men were in the street, looking up at him. In the front rank were Mike Sloan and Frank Jessup, their thumbs hooked in their broad leather belts. Close by were Jud Mace and young Jake Sarney, the latter with his hand on the butt of his pearl-handled six-gun.

"Hand over that polecat, Augie!" demanded Frank Jessup. "Yuh can't stop us an' if yuh try yuh'll on'y get somebody hurt. Hand him over."

Augie shook his head.

"Can't do that, Frank. Yuh oughta know I can't. Yuh better clear out o' here 'n' let th' law handle Dave. Yuh fellers ain't got no right comin' 'round here 'n' keepin' me awake all night—"

Augie broke off and reached for his gun. And then something dropped over his head; his arms were drawn tight to his side and he was yanked sidewise into the arms of the men waiting for him. A man had climbed to the roof of the jail from behind and had dropped the noose of a lariat over Augie's head as he stood before the door.

The crowd surged forward.

"Back!"

And they stopped. There was mettle in that tone. They stared up at the little man in the doorway.

Tim had his arms folded across his chest. His glasses were off now, and cold eyes glittered watchfully. He seemed to have suddenly grown taller, and grim and cold. There was about him a reckless something that had to be reckoned with.

"Get back!" he snapped. "See this?" With his thumb he tapped the shining star on his coat lapel. "That's the law, you half-witted sidewinders! It's bigger than you an' me an' all Sunbake, you cow-nursin', lump-headed—"

"Don't do it!" barked Frank Jessup. In his hand he held his big .45, its muzzle pointed straight at Tim Wiley's stomach. "Make a quick move 'n' I'll bore yuh! We've had about enough of you, with yuh're —— fool talk. Hand over that gun under yuhr arm!"

Tim stood motionless with his arms still folded across his chest. Mike Sloan stepped forward a pace and spoke gruffly, anxiously.

"Don't go gettin' yuhrself in trouble, Tim. I give yuh a warnin' a while ago." The others looked puzzled as Mike and Tim exchanged glances. "Keep yuhr hand off that gun, Tim. Lemme take it out from under yuhr arm."

But Tim already had the gun out of its holster. Gripping it by the barrel, pointing toward himself, he held it out to Frank Jessup.

Mike tensed. He bit down on his mustache. He wished he knew what Tim was going to do. All Tim had to do was let Frank take that gun, and everything would be all right. Mike wavered, not knowing what to do.

Frank Jessup had his hand out for the gun. He half lowered his own gun as his fingers brushed Tim's. But his fingers did no more than brush it. For like a snake the long black .44 curled around his hand and the heavy butt landed with a little slap in Tim's palm.

"Drop it, Frank!"

Frank Jessup let his gun fall to the

ground. The muzzle of Tim's gun swept in a little circle, and the crowd pressed back. Tim backed into the doorway.

"Kid Bart!" cried Jake Sarney. "That's Kid Bart. He's the on'y one kin do the gun-twirl like that! He got away from the sheriff, down in Texas—twenty years in jail—reward—"

His hand streaked for his gun. He got it from the holster, but a .44 slug smashed into his arm and jerked him off his balance. Tim Wiley leaped inside the sheriff's office and slammed the door.

The crowd waited. Many guns were out, but no one fired. The dozen old-timers found one another out and exchanged uncertain looks.

"Well, what're we gonna do?" demanded some one on the outskirts of the crowd.

Mike Sloan tied a quick diamond hitch in his mustache. Then his teeth clicked together and he faced them all.

"I tell yuh what we're gonna do," he rumbled fiercely. "We're gonna call it off. Kid Bart just give up twenty years o' life for law 'n' order, an' if he wants it that bad there must be somethin' to it. An' me, I'm ready to battle like —— to help him get it!"

"Me too," growled Frank Jessup, and then Jud Mace and the other old-timers chimed in agreement. They pushed forward and formed a grim little group before the sheriff's office. Some one thrust a gun in Augie's hand and he joined them. After all, Kid Bart was an old-timer like themselves.

"—— Mike," called a voice from the street, "if yuh feel that way about it, yuh ole buckaroo, yuh don't have to go slingin' any lead. We don't know what it's all about, but whatever it is there's a lot of us here willin' to go right along with yuh, just the same. Le's ramble over to the Mirror and see 'f there's any o' this here newfangled law 'n' order in any o' them purty bottles."

Fifteen minutes later, Augie Underholtz was locking Kid Bart in a cell.

"I sure hate to do this, old-timer," he said, shaking his head. "After yuh been around here all these years, never doin' any harm, an' always actin' like a white man with ev'rybody—"

"It's all right, Augie," said Kid Bart wearily.

"Twenty years, hey?" mused Augie. "H'mm!"

"I'll never do it, Augie. Couldn't stand it. Ain't used to bein' locked up, an' I couldn't stand it."

Augie nodded. Tim wasn't so young as he had been, and twenty years behind iron bars and stone walls is a long, long time.

Augie struggled with curious thoughts.

"I dunno—well—" He scratched his head. "I think I'll take yuh over to th' county seat t'morrow mornin', Tim. Yeah." He grinned. "Think I'll go have a talk with Mike Sloan 'n' Frank Jessup. Got somethin' I wanta ask 'em about."

NEXT morning, when the deputy had returned, Augie and Kid Bart started for the county seat, thirty miles away. Six miles out of town, Augie slowed his horse to a walk.

"Ain't no hurry," he said. "Take it easy."

He looked at his enormous silver watch.

They were skirting a tumbled pile of rock at a mesa rim when three masked men appeared in the road ahead, each with a gun in his hand.

"Elevate 'em, Sheriff!"

The sheriff did.

"I ain't got no money," he said.

"We don't want money. We want Kid Bart, that old-timer yuh got there. We're friends o' his'n."

"Yuh are, hey? Now ain't that nice!" Augie grinned at Frank Jessup's big sombrero with the cigaret burn in the exact front; at Jud Mace's paint horse and silver-mounted bridle and saddle, and at Mike Sloan's rivet-studded leather chaps.

"Yuh fellers sure are disguised," he said. "Masks 'n' everything. ——, I dunno who yuh are."

The men jostled their horses in between Augie's and the wondering Kid Bart's. The sheriff scratched his head.

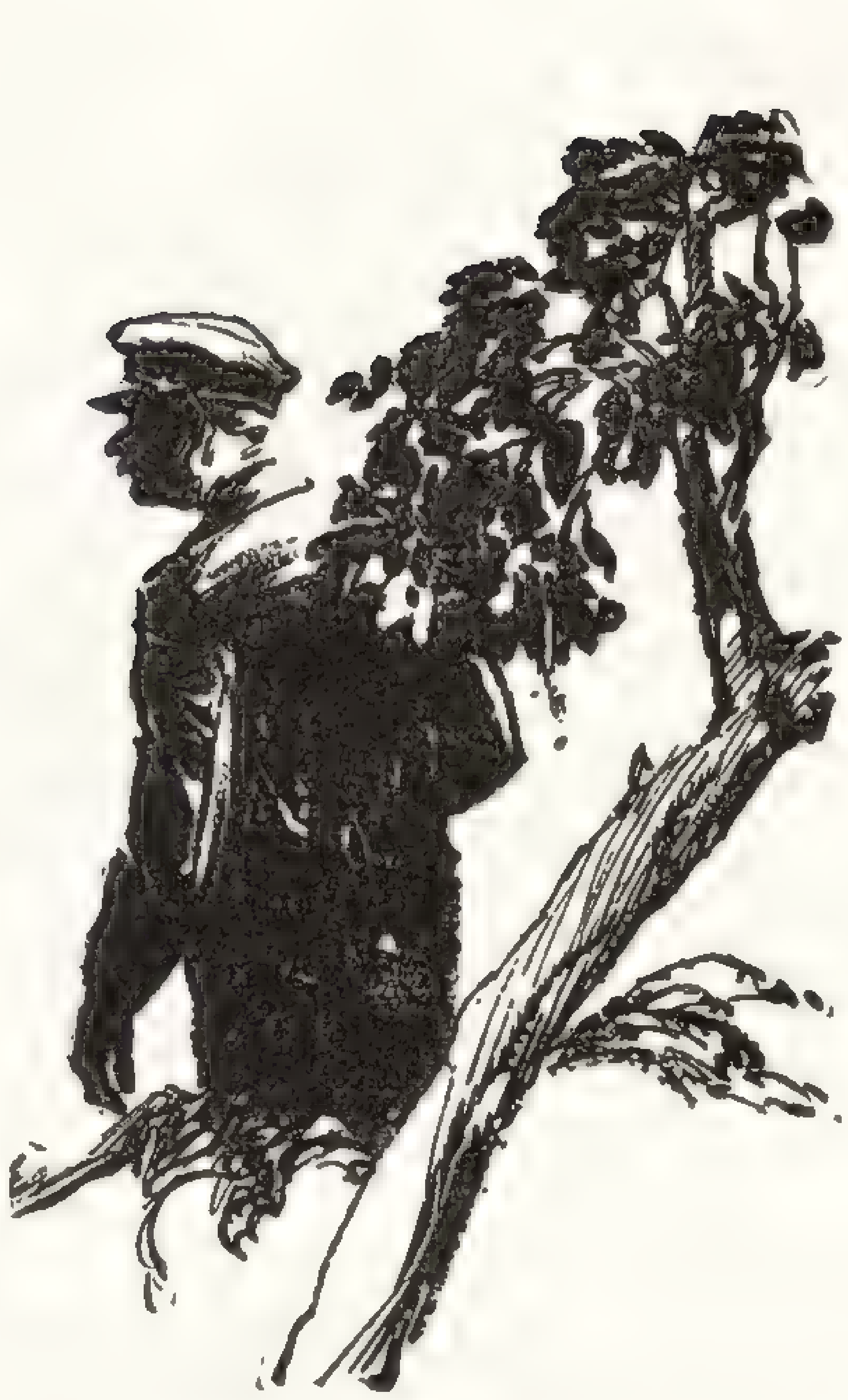
"Guess I better be streakin' it back to town," he said, "to raise a posse."

But he didn't exactly streak. He slumped lazily in the saddle and let his horse amble along with drooping head. Now and then Augie stopped and rolled a cigaret, or waited with admirable patience while his horse chewed at an occasional bit of dried vegetation. Once he glanced back and saw that his prisoner and the three masked men were gone. His horse stopped of its own accord.

"Ain't right to push a poor hoss to death on a hot day like this," commented Augie, and rolled another cigaret.

The story of a Fateful Meeting

A NIGHT IN SAN ASENSIO



TO UNDERSTAND this tale properly one should bear in mind that nobody, not even an admiral, can live so lonely a life at sea as the captain of a tramp steamer.

Mr. Westcott, third engineer of the S. S. *Lockborough Inlet*, decided early in the evening that he was tired of sitting in a hot and crowded café on the Calle Valencia, drinking cheap and fiery Spanish wine and smoking innumerable cigarets and listening to a fifth-rate cabaret show. He wanted to be by himself. He wanted exercise. He wanted fresh air. He wanted, above all, to be free of the companionship of the second mate and the fourth engineer, both enjoying themselves far too much.

He had calculated that, at the rate they were throwing their money around, there would be brawling along the Calle Valencia and the Plaza de San Juan before midnight, and possibly police interference. And being a quiet, hard working young man, intent on getting his chief's ticket when next he was home, Mr. Westcott wished to avoid all possible chance of coming into conflict either with the authorities or with the captain of the *Lockborough Inlet* whom he disliked and feared, with no better reason than that he was a stern, silent man who kept to himself and had a poor opinion of human nature.

And so Mr. Westcott set out for a long, hard walk up the hills at the back of the town and there met with adventures and had a narrow escape from being killed and was given an insight into Captain Selby's past that bewildered him.

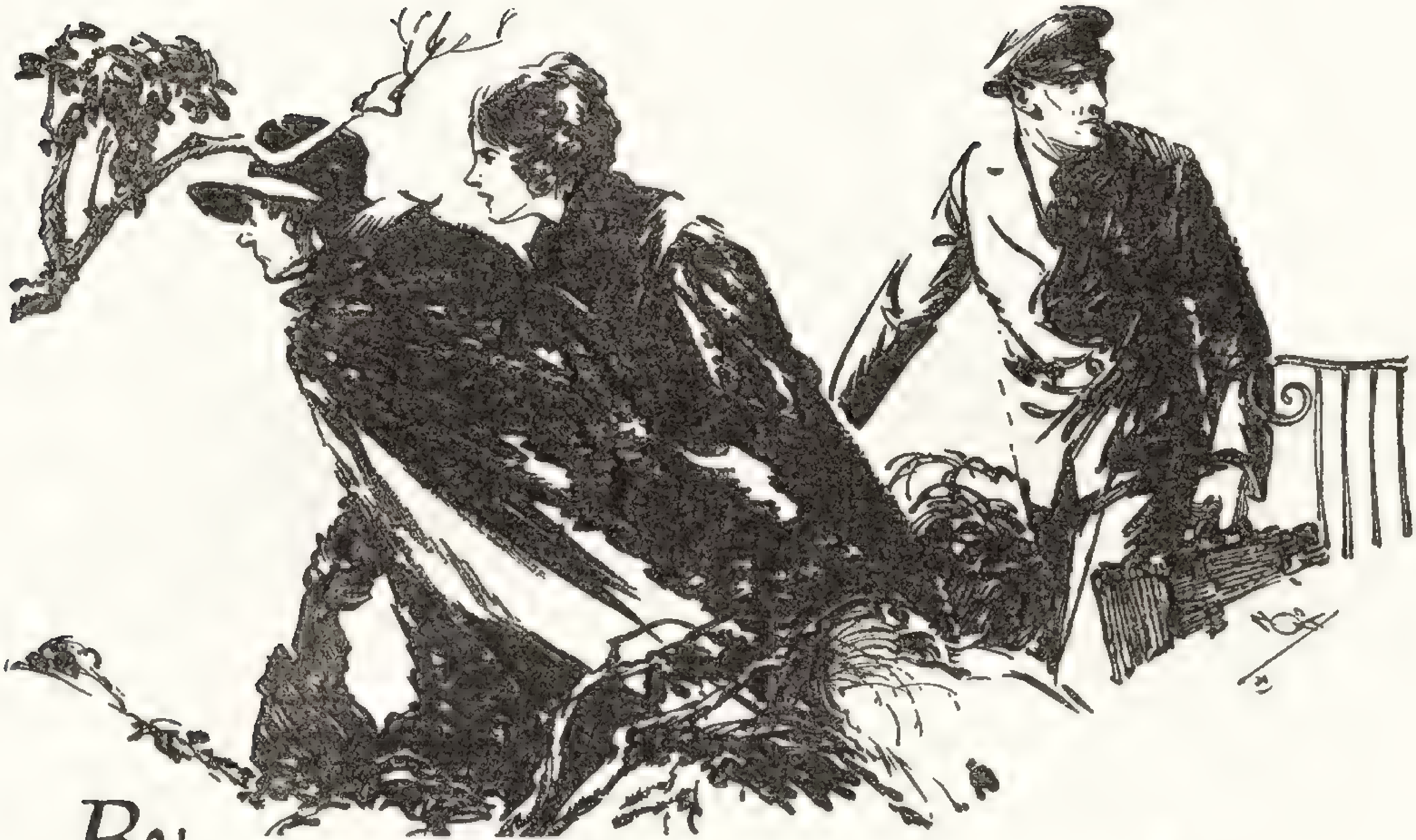
He walked quickly through narrow streets until at last he reached a quarter where there were gardens and stone-faced terraces and large villas, high above the dusty road, among cypress-trees and palms and olives and fig-trees and oaks.

Aware that he was tired, he slackened speed and halted.

It was late. He was a long way from the ship. He was about to turn when a strange impulse swept over him to leave the road and climb a flight of broad stone steps on the right.

He did not believe in telepathy or thought transference or intuition or anything so stupid, but some one who lived on the hill was in trouble, he felt sure.

Against his better judgment, he began to ascend the broad steps between high brick



By W. Townend

walls topped by masses of geranium. The steps twisted to the left; the width between the walls narrowed; trees met overhead. It was dark and difficult to see.

He walked slowly on, exasperated by his own stupidity.

The steps turned sharply to the right and became a level pathway, paved with flat stone slabs. Mr. Westcott paused at a tall iron gate in the wall on his right. Steps led down into a garden overgrown with shrubs and tall weeds. By the light of the nine-day-old moon he could see a white villa half hidden among trees. No lights were visible. The place looked forlorn and deserted. He wondered uncomfortably who lived there.

After a while he moved on again, knowing that he ought to turn back and yet unwilling even now to disobey the strange promptings that had drawn him from the road.

The garden wall bent back at right angles to the path which was now an earth track that led across a narrow, grassy terrace on the side of the hill toward a small pine wood.

Mr. Westcott paused once more at the corner of the wall. Beneath him he saw the city of San Asensio: its lamplit streets and plazas and wide boulevards, the bay surrounded by high hills, the lights of the shipping harbor, and the red and white flash of the lighthouse at the point four miles south. The night was cooler; a breeze blew inland from the Pacific; the air was heavy with the scent of cedars and flowers, roses and heliotrope and freesia, and orange blossom. Somewhere far down the hill some one was strumming a plaintive little air on a guitar. He wondered why music he had loathed so in that café on the Calle Valencia should here seem so sweet.

He seated himself in the low fork of an olive-tree at the corner of the garden wall and a man emerged from the wood on to the terrace in front of him and stood contemplating the view, bareheaded, his arms folded across his broad chest. Presently he turned and approached leisurely, and to his amazement Mr. Westcott saw the hard, brown face and heavy eyebrows of the captain of the *Lockborough Inlet*. He passed the tree in which he sat and stopped at the tall iron gate and gazed through the bars into the garden. Then, with a kind of growl distinctly audible to Mr. Westcott, he walked briskly away, down the path that would take him to the flight of stone steps and the dusty road and San Asensio.

And what in heaven's name was Captain Selby doing here? Mr. Westcott was puzzled.

A slight shuffling noise made him glance quickly to the right. A man in black, wearing a black soft-brimmed sombrero, stood between the tree where he was hidden and the corner of the wall, staring fixedly after Captain Selby. He was a shortish man with wide shoulders and all that it was possible to see of his face was a long, sharp nose and a black mustache.

For a moment he remained motionless; then making no sound he crept cautiously along the path by the garden wall.

As a rule Mr. Westcott considered himself shock-proof, but now he felt worried and even a little scared. The man in black must have been watching Captain Selby from the tangle of brush that hid the side of the wall at right angles to the path.

And what did it all mean? Anything or nothing!

He came to the conclusion that whether he liked Captain Selby or not, it was his duty to warn him he was followed.

He slid to the ground and stumbled and swore.

"——!"

As he reached the gate a low voice whispered—

"For God's sake, stop!"

The gate opened and a big fair-haired woman without a hat and having a dark Spanish cloak thrown over a dark frock caught hold of his arm.

"You're English!" she breathed. "I heard you!"

"North of Ireland."

"Come here. You must!"

"Why?"

"Please!" she whispered. "Please don't argue! I'm English! I'm being watched. My husband's in danger of being killed. You've got to help me. You must!"

MR. WESTCOTT and the big fair-haired woman stood on a path, overgrown with grass, under a fig-tree, well out of sight of the gate through which he had entered the garden.

"You haven't said!" she whispered.

"I'll help you, lady, yes."

"Did he see you?"

"Who?"

"The man at the gate."

"No. I don't think so." He was puzzled. "Is your husband here?"

"No. He's hidden away outside the town. Nobody knows where but me. If they find him, they'll shoot him."

She shuddered: he could feel the pressure of her hands relax and tighten.

"They?" he asked.

"Political enemies. Oh! you can't understand if you don't live here! It's terrible! He got himself mixed up with a plot against the president! Revolution! I warned him but he wouldn't listen! And now it's too late! They swore they'd kill him without mercy and they meant it! You don't know what they're like—I do!"

She brought her face very near to Mr. Westcott's, so near that he could feel her warm breath on his cheek.

"We left some letters behind when we escaped three days ago. We had to have them. I got into the house last night and I've been there ever since. How did I know they'd be waiting for us to come back? It must have been only by chance I wasn't seen when I opened the gate, because an hour afterward when I was ready to go I saw a man hiding behind a tree. He didn't see me. I waited, but he didn't go. Then I went to the front gate and saw another man. Tonight the men are still there, watching. I can't leave by either of the two gates. I don't know how it was you weren't seen by the man on guard when you walked down the path just now! And then that other man came and he saw him and followed, but he won't have gone very far. I didn't dare run any risk of trying to get away for fear he'd turn and come after me. Now, what are we going to do? Tell me!"

"Isn't it dangerous for us to be standing here talking?" said Mr. Westcott.

"We've got to talk somewhere, haven't we?"

"They might take it into their heads to search the house?"

"They've done that already. But they didn't find what they wanted."

"The letters."

"Not the ones I came back for. They're important, but not so important as the ones we took away with us last week. If they'd got those I don't know what we'd have done."

"Why don't you tell the police?"

"What good would that do? They're on the other side!"

"I see." Mr. Westcott considered. "What will happen when we reach the road?"

"Nothing. We'll have to pass the front gate on our way down, of course. If the men on guard see us, they'll think you're an English sailor taking a walk with a girl! I'm young enough for that, aren't I?"

Mr. Westcott thought of his girl at home and nodded. Ada wouldn't like him to go walking out with other women, but in the circumstances it couldn't be helped! Clearly, it was his duty to help the woman reach her husband.

"You're not afraid, are you?" she whispered.

Her tone angered him.

"Afraid! No!"

But was he? He was doubtful. It was easy enough to talk, but how, supposing the man in black was still at the gate, how did he think they were going to get past him without being seen?

"It's not a bit of use our standing here, doing nothing!" she said. "It's getting late and I've got to get back to my husband."

Mr. Westcott turned and made his way slowly up the hill through the shrubs and mimosa and cypress-trees toward the wall.

He listened and heard nothing.

The wall was higher on the garden side than on the side of the path by three feet. He could not see over the top. He moved cautiously toward the gateway and found a tree stump which would give him a foothold. Screened by an overhanging limb of a fig-tree he climbed the wall and saw the man in black approaching softly in the grass between the wall and the path. He paused to light a cigaret.

Mr. Westcott gathered himself together and sprang. The man crumpled under him without a word and lay very still and twisted.

Mr. Westcott scrambled to his feet, rolled him over on to his back and gagged him by a piece of stick thrust between his teeth and secured by a handkerchief, its ends knotted at the back of his neck.

The woman stood by his side.

"You must bind his hands. See if he's wearing a belt!"

He nodded and undid a sash the man had about his waist and once more rolling him over, bound his hands behind him.

The man wriggled.

"Fasten his legs," she said. "Here, use this scarf! Make haste!"

Mr. Westcott rose from his knees.

"He's trussed all right. Let's go!"

"Take my arm," said the woman. "It'll look more like the real thing."

Together they passed along the narrow pathway and down the winding flight of steps between the brick walls topped with geraniums.

Mr. Westcott was troubled. Suppose they were seen! Suppose the man he had gagged were found before they were out of reach! Suppose they were followed and tracked to the house to which they were bound!

What if they were?

What he was doing was right, he knew.

He wondered how the second mate and the fourth engineer would take it if they could see him now, arm in arm with a handsome fair-haired woman. He wondered what he would do if he met the captain.

"Talk!" said the woman. "Talk, please!"

They had reached the end of the flight of stone steps.

"What about?" he asked.

"Anything," she said wearily. "Anything at all! You're a sailor ashore for the evening. I'm a girl you've met down in the town. We've been for a walk."

"It's a great night, ain't it, Mary?"

"You bet!" She laughed. "Why, yais! My name no' Mary!"

He knew from the sudden change in her accent that she was acting the part of a girl he was supposed to have picked up in the town.

"You bet! I enjoy mysel' wit' you! Yais! You naice boy, hey! Come for walk wi' naice li'l girl!" She lowered her voice. "Play up to me, for God's sake!"

"I could do with a —— big drink when we get back to the town, eh, Mary! Couldn't you?"

"You bet!" she said. "—— beeg drink, hey!"

On either side were dark masses of trees and gardens high up above the white, dusty road and walls of rough granite.

They came to a large iron gate on their left. The woman tightened her clasp on Mr. Westcott's arm and he knew that this was the front gate of her home. Two men stood by the wall under the trees. One of them stepped forward.

Mr. Westcott began to sing in passable imitation of a man who had had too much drink.

"Here'sh jolly good lul-luck t'girl who lovesh a shail'r—" He broke off suddenly. "Ever hear zhat shong, Mary, eh? Goo' li'l shong, eh?"

She laughed shrilly.

"You bait I hear zat song! Ver' often!"

Mr. Westcott waved his hand to the man watching them.

"Ev'nin', *amigo! Buenos noches, señor! Comment allez-vous? Bon, eh?* Zha's wrong language, ain' it? French, not Spanish!"

The man muttered something and sauntered back to where the other man was waiting. Mr. Westcott and the woman continued on their way down the hill, still singing and chattering.

They reached a bend in the road and the gateway was hidden from view.

"Good!" said the woman. "Good! You played up fine. I'd never have got past them by myself." He could feel that she was shivering though the night was still hot. "They'd have got me!"

"Well," he said, "that's over, anyway."

She looked at him out of the corners of her eyes.

"It's not over," she said. "It's not properly begun."

Presently she said:

"You've done me a kindness I'll never forget. My husband will never forget, either."

Then she halted and withdrew her arm from his and held out her hand.

"Listen, it wouldn't be fair on you for me to ask you to come any farther! You've done enough."

"Lady, it wouldn't be fair on you if I dropped out now. I promised to help. I will help. I don't have to be aboard my ship till morning. That's to say, nobody'll ever know if I'm not. Ten to one the night watchman is probably fast asleep!"

"You're a sailor, are you?"

"Third engineer of the *Lockborough Inlet.* If there's any other way I can help you, beside seeing you to your husband, you must let me know."

She moved on again with a little nod of her head.

"Thank you. I've had rather a bad time. And it's some distance to go yet. And I'm frightened. A little—not much, of course—my capacity for fear isn't—isn't as great as it was once!"

For some time they walked in silence. Then when they came to the head of a wide flight of stone steps on the right of the road she touched his arm and said:

"We turn down here. It's quicker."

They descended between small villas, perched high up on the steep hill slopes, one overlooking the other.

Few people were about; few lights were visible in the houses. Occasionally they would pass a small wine shop from which came the sound of voices, singing perhaps, and laughing. Or music. Once they saw at a corner three dark-skinned men disputing with another who stood with his back to the wall. The three men were angry; the man with his back to the wall shrugged his shoulders and laughed. One of the men hit him on the face; he spat and drew a sheath knife.

"Don't stop!" said the woman. "Don't I beg of you!"

"I'd no intention," said Mr. Westcott. "I'm a peaceful kind of man by nature, lady."

Later he said—

"You know your way."

"Unfortunately, yes."

He pondered on what she had meant. Why, unfortunately?

She sighed.

"Tired?"

"Horribly! So tired I can hardly keep moving. But I've got to. When I think of my poor husband I feel—I feel faint almost. He's been by himself for twenty-four hours. He won't know whether I'm dead or alive!"

She shrugged her shoulders very much after the style of the man who had stood with his back to the wall, knife in hand.

"We can't walk too quickly, either—it'd look suspicious, though there's not much danger now. At least, I don't think so."

They made their way more slowly, through a region of mean streets, lanes and alleys and tenements

And then it seemed to Mr. Westcott that he could hear steady footsteps pursuing them. Twice he glanced back over his shoulder.

"What is it?" said the woman.

"Nothing!"

"What do you hear?"

He halted and listened. No sound came to him in the silence but the croaking of frogs and the beat of the surf on the shore.

"Nothing," he said.

They moved on once more across the flat country, vegetable and market gardens, patches of reeds and olive orchards, small farmhouses with clusters of sheds and outbuildings and hedges and clumps of aloes and prickly-pear.

"We're here!" said the woman.

Stunted trees that looked like cottonwoods had masked the approach to a small dark house with shuttered windows, lying some little distance off the road down a sandy wagon track.

The woman led the way under the naked poles of a pergola into a small front garden, bare of all vegetation save weeds and long withered grass and a dead lemon-tree. She whistled softly.

"That's our signal," she said. "Wait here, do you mind? I'm going round the back way. I'll have to explain to my husband."

Mr. Westcott seated himself on the step of the narrow veranda, over which grew a ragged bougainvillea.

A broad-shouldered man approached and he sprang to his feet in sudden panic.

THE captain of the *Lockborough Inlet* stood under the poles of the pergola.

"Hope I've not startled you, Mr. Westcott!" he said gruffly.

"Well, sir, you have! I wasn't exactly expecting you or any one else!"

The front door opened. And then the woman said in a stifled voice—

"For ——'s sake, tell me who's there?"

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said Mr. Westcott hastily. "It's a—a friend of mine." He spoke to the captain. "This is an English lady who's in trouble, sir. I've been seeing her home to her husband. Enemies are trying to find him."

"We can't stay here talking, then!" said the captain.

"Come inside, both of you!" said the woman.

They entered an entrance hall, so dark it was impossible to see. Mr. Westcott closed the door and turned the key in the lock.

"Who are you?" said the woman.

"My name's Selby, ma'm. Captain Selby of the S. S. *Lockborough Inlet.* At your service, ma'm."

Mr. Westcott heard the woman catch her breath.

He tried to reassure her.

"Captain Selby will be able to help you much more than I shall," he said.

She did not speak, and he wondered for an instant if she had crept silently away and left them alone together in the dark hall.

Suddenly she clutched at his arm.

"How help me?" she whispered. "How?"

How? He did not know. It all depended. Thoughts chased each other through his mind. Why was Captain Selby here, in this little dark house so far from San Asensio? Had he seen them and followed them, or what?

"Mr. Westcott," said the captain, "if ever you have to truss up a man again, don't leave him where any one who happens to pass will see him! I carried him into the garden. No one will find him—not yet, at least. I hope not, anyway. I looked after his two friends, too. But I think it better to warn you there are probably others."

A door near where they stood opened an inch or so. A chink of yellow light shone in the blackness, and a man's voice spoke in a language that Mr. Westcott could not understand—Spanish, he thought, or Italian: he was not sure which.

The woman said huskily in English:

"It's all right, Paul. These are my friends. English gentlemen. Will you come in here, both of you? My husband would like to meet you."

Mr. Westcott felt the captain's hand press heavily on his shoulder and urge him forward. He entered a small hot room with the windows closed and shuttered and lighted by a candle set on an inverted saucer on the table. A man with a drawn, haggard face, thin, regular features and dark eyes stood between the table and a small stove. Once he might have been handsome and distinguished looking, but now he was worn and ill and furtive. His black hair and black mustache enhanced the pallor of his skin. He said nothing but glanced first at Mr. Westcott and then at Captain Selby, last of all at the woman.

"My husband!" she said.

She threw back her dark cloak and gazed defiantly at the two sailors.

"And I beg of you," she said, "whatever happens, please, for my sake, do not raise your voices!"

Mr. Westcott, watching her intently, waiting for her to explain, was impressed by her bigness of frame, her width of shoulder, her bearing. She was handsome in a virile, bold way that hinted at an independence of character and a strength of mind and a courage greater by far than her husband's. He did not like to think that this woman whom he admired for her spirit could have married a man so vastly her inferior, and a foreigner, at that! He was her inferior, of course! The fact was obvious. And yet for his sake she was risking her life, her future, her safety.

Her husband approached and spoke to her in Spanish.

She put her hand to her head quickly, then groped with the other hand for the table.

"Tony!" he said. "Tony, what is it?"

"Nothing, Paul. I feel a little faint! Not very!"

She seated herself on the chair that he pushed toward her and rested her elbow on the table.

"You've been in danger, madam," said the captain. His voice, though low enough was harsh and overbearing and proud.

Mr. Westcott was angry.

What hidden mystery was there in the Old Man's past, he wondered, that made him say, as he did say often, on the evidence of the chief, that women were the cause of all the wickedness in the world and that without women to send them wrong men would be decent and clean and good! He hated women, every one on board the *Lockborough Inlet* knew that, as other men hated cowardice or disloyalty to a friend or sharp practise or falsehood.

His square, sun-tanned face was very grim; his eyes, rather narrow eyes at the best of times, under black bushy eyebrows, were puckered into two slits as if he were gazing from the bridge into the fierce sunshine reflected on the calm tropic sea; lines showed in the flesh from the arched, scornful nostrils of his high-bridged nose to the corners of his mouth; his thin lips were pressed tight—the more one looked at him, the more sullen and hostile and bad tempered did he appear.

"Madam," he said in an old-fashioned, stilted way, "if I can be of any service, pray command me!"

Pink flooded the woman's cheeks. Into her blue eyes there came a startled, wondering expression that made her look almost a girl again. Her lips quivered and she seemed, for the moment, on the verge of tears.

Mr. Westcott, no longer angry, was amazed. Never before in the two years that he had known and detested Captain Selby had he heard of him offering to do a kindness to any human being, man, woman or child!

"Won't you sit down?" said the woman.

"Thank you, ma'm."

Captain Selby seated himself on one chair, Mr. Westcott on another. The woman's husband stood by the table, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders hunched. He spoke to his wife in Spanish under his breath. She answered him in the same low tone. He rested his hands on the table and said something else. She shook her head. Apparently he was urging on her a course of action to which she would not or could not agree.

Mr. Westcott yawned. He was growing sleepy. What a story he would have to tell Ada when he reached Cardiff again! He hoped, rather diffidently, that she would understand his motives in helping the woman. Ada was the sweetest girl that ever lived, but she might not like to think of him trudging around South American seaports at dead of night with handsome women, even if they did have husbands they were in love with! Ada might think him indiscreet, not to be trusted out of her sight!

And that, thought Mr. Westcott, would never do.

Captain Selby folded his arms on the table and said:

"Something's got to be done. It's late. You want help. Oughtn't you to take me into your confidence?"

The woman shuddered.

"Captain," she said, "my husband has enemies—political enemies—who swear they'll kill him! They'll show him no mercy, I know. We must get him away, tonight, or it'll be too late. You see what I mean! My husband's the finest man in the world—" Her voice faltered.

"The finest man in the world!" said Captain Selby. "Well, ma'm."

"The very finest!" said the woman steadily.

To Mr. Westcott, an enthralled observer, moved both by the sight of her beauty and her emotion, it seemed that she felt that Captain Selby did not believe her.

"No one knows what my husband means to me! How dear he is! How splendid!"

She rose to her feet suddenly.

"I've got to save him or—or I might as well die! Do you understand, Captain

Selby? If my husband were to die, I'd die, too!"

The light from the candle was dim. It was not easy to see things clearly. But it struck Mr. Westcott, glancing from one grave face to the other, that Captain Selby looked subdued and almost ashamed of himself, as if it was quite outside his range of experience to find husband and wife in love.

The woman moved across the room to where he sat and he stood up quickly.

"Captain Selby," she said, "have you a mother? You had once. For her sake, then, have some pity on a woman who needs your help! It's tearing my heart to have to ask you this favor! I don't know why you're here, how it all happened, but I've prayed on bended knees, night after night, that a way of deliverance would be opened out, and you're here! You don't believe me? You don't think any woman can pray as I've prayed and have her prayers answered! It's the truth, all the same! Why are you here? You've been sent! Captain Selby, I'm asking you, as a woman who loves her husband, to take him aboard your ship and get him away from San Asensio and his enemies!"

"And my wife, also!" said the husband. "Captain, you will take my wife, also!"

"I can't take a woman aboard my ship!" said Captain Selby.

There was a strained silence.

"Take my husband," said the woman. "That's all I ask, Captain!"

"No."

He shook his head. She put her hands out and he took a step backward toward the wall.

"No, ma'm, I can't do it!"

"God!" said the woman. "Are you as bitter as that?"

"Hush!" said the husband. "You make so much noise! Please!"

"Take my husband!" said the woman.

"No," said Captain Selby. "You're asking what's not possible!" Beads of sweat glistened on his forehead. "It's hot in here, isn't it?"

"And you said, not ten minutes ago, if you could be of any service, I was to command you! You're rather a hypocrite, Captain Selby, aren't you? You'd better go now, perhaps. Would you like to know who my husband's enemies are, so you can tell them where he is?"

She covered her face with her hands and began to sob brokenly.

Mr. Westcott felt rather sick. Why, why when he knew what kind of an animal the man was, had he imagined him capable of a decent action?

"Captain Selby!" he said. "You listen to me!" And then he stopped.

"One moment, Mr. Westcott, I know just what you're going to say. Don't!" He turned to the woman. "Madam, I said I'd help you. I will. No, don't interrupt, please! I want to think."

"If I stay here," said the woman's husband, "they will most certainly kill me. You will take me, at least, then, if I am to be separated from my poor wife!"

The woman went to him and took his hand in hers. He put her away from him impatiently, as if matters were too difficult now for any display of affection.

"You must get out of here," said Captain Selby shortly. "Your wife, also! It wouldn't be fair for you to leave her. I'll have no woman aboard my ship—not even my chief engineer's wife, or my mate's, from one home port to another! That's a rule of mine. I never go back on a rule, once I've made up my mind that it's a rule worth keeping."

"No," said the woman, "you've made up your mind. And so you won't help us! You're one of those men who lay down rules and obey them, no matter how wrong they may be! You're always right, aren't you, Captain Selby?"

She tilted her chin and gazed at him scornfully from under her dark lashes.

"Captain Selby, wasn't there ever a woman in your life you loved?"

"No, ma'm, never! I've had my dreams, of course. Most men have. But no woman ever meant anything to me. No woman ever will. But I'm not a monster, ma'm. And I keep my word. I said I'd help you. I will. I can't take you, myself, Mrs.—Mrs.—"

He hesitated and the woman said—

"Alvarez is the name."

"Thank you. I can't take you, myself, Mrs. Alvarez, but I know some one who will. Another ship is lying near the *Lockborough Inlet*. The captain's a friend of mine. He'll give you and your husband a passage, if I ask him. I'll help you aboard and make all the necessary arrangements. Will that suit you?"

The woman stood by the table, her hands to her cheeks, her eyes gazing past him into space. She did not answer.

"I'd rather sail with you, Captain Selby," said the man. "You I can trust, but—with all respect, Captain, your friend—can I trust him? Your pardon, Captain, but suppose he is not reliable?"

"He's more reliable than I'd be," said Captain Selby. He showed his teeth in a mirthless grin. "Do you accept?"

"We've got to accept," said the woman. She uttered a hard laugh. "We wouldn't, if we didn't have to!"

"Will you hold your tongue!" whispered the husband.

He spoke to her again in Spanish. She nodded her head in agreement and looked at him humbly and patted his hand.

Mr. Westcott, still watching the drama being played out before him, knew without being told that the love she bore her husband was greater than her husband's love for her.

She, too, was speaking in Spanish.

"When is this other ship sailing?" she said presently.

"Tomorrow, ma'm," said the captain. He looked at his watch. "I should say, today. It's later than I thought."

"Hadn't we better be going?" said Mr. Westcott uneasily.

Once more, as on the road up the hill from San Asensio, he was being warned. Danger was imminent. He felt as he had felt when a steam pipe had burst and a fireman had been killed. The thought came to him that some one or other in the small hot room with the shuttered windows would be dead before daybreak.

"——!" he said. "I wish—"

He broke off and sat, listening, his arms folded on his knees. Queer, the noises one heard in an empty house at night! The wind rattling the shutters, the rustling of leaves, the scampering of rats in the walls!

Alvarez, the husband, opened a cupboard door and brought out a black bottle.

"You must have some cognac! Tony, will you fetch some glasses?"

The woman nodded and went quietly out of the room.

"Politics," said the captain, "are dangerous. I often think, señor, I'd as soon be a criminal in this country as a politician. There'd be less danger!"

The man looked at him very seriously and nodded his head.

"Yes, Captain, less danger! Especially if you have engaged foolishly in a plot and have changed your mind wisely, and withdrawn. It makes you enemies."

"They want to kill you?"

"Because I know too much they are afraid and they want to kill me."

Mr. Westcott, straining his ears, heard a faint creaking in the room above, as though some one was walking cautiously with long, slow strides across the bare floor boards. His heart began to thump and he sat stifled, almost afraid to breathe lest he should miss anything that might happen.

He held up his hand by way of warning.

The two men broke off their whispered conversation and stared.

He rose noiselessly to his feet.

Again he heard the soft creaking overhead.

"What is it?" he said. "Listen!"

"The wind," said Alvarez. "The wind. Yes—"

"I can hear nothing," said the captain. "Not letting your imagination run away with you, are you, Mr. Westcott?"

"No. I heard something, I swear." Mr. Westcott suddenly began to doubt. "At least, I think I did!"

"You didn't!" said Captain Selby.

They waited in silence.

Slow footsteps sounded in the passage.

Alvarez was bending forward, his hands pressing on the table. He choked.

The door opened. Against the blackness no one was visible.

Captain Selby drew a squat automatic pistol from his hip pocket.

"Who is it?" he said.

The woman entered the room, carrying in her hands a tray on which were glasses, a loaf of bread and some cheese.

"Whatever's the matter?" she asked.

"Did you hear anything, Tony?" said her husband. "Were you upstairs just now?"

She gave him a startled look of inquiry.

"No."

She spoke in a breathless, frightened way that made Mr. Westcott think she, too, had heard what he had heard.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I'm going to have a look round."

"There's nothing, I know," said Captain Selby. "All the same, it's as well to make sure. With your permission, ma'm, I'm going upstairs!"

He passed out of the ground floor room into the dark passage.

Mr. Westcott followed him to the foot of the stairs and then Captain Selby whispered:

"Better stay where you are, Mister. I'm worried."

MR. WESTCOTT waited. Something creaked behind his back. He turned swiftly but could see nothing and hear nothing.

He moved away from the foot of the stairs, feeling his way with his outstretched hands, risking he did not know quite what, and then he saw in the blackness a vertical slit of moonlight.

He dug his teeth into his lower lip and clenched his fists. Who had come into the house last? He had. Had he left the door open? No, he was certain not. He had turned the key in the lock. He remembered perfectly. Some one else must have opened the door. From the outside? He felt with his hands. No, the key was still in the lock on the inside.

Some one had left the house since he and Captain Selby and Mrs. Alvarez had entered!

He opened the door wider and stared out into the night. The moon was low in the west, invisible from where he stood, but he could see sharp pointed aloes and a stunted tree and the ramshackle shed and part of a broken wall and the flat country beyond, between the house and the sea.

Captain Selby descended the stairs softly.

"There's no one on the top floor," he said.

"I locked the front door when we came in," said Mr. Westcott. "Now it's open."

"Stay here!" said Captain Selby. "Keep your eyes open! Have you got a gun, Mister?"

"No."

"Can't be helped. Give a shout if you see anything!"

He vanished around the side of the house to the left, in the shadow cast by the moon: he reappeared after a short interval, walking very slowly across the open, from the direction of the shed.

When the door was closed, and locked once more, he whispered:

"I crawled right round the house in the brush, then I went back of the aloes and the wall on hands and knees to the shed. There's no one there. But I tell you what, Mr. Westcott: I saw a man walking along the road toward San Asensio!"

The woman spoke from the darkness.

"You saw a man on the road?"

"Yes, ma'm."

They stood once more about the table in the small, hot room.

"Let's be going!" said the woman. "For God's sake, let's get away from this awful house."

She shuddered and put her hands to her cheeks and gazed at her husband with wide-open eyes.

"Paul, I'm frightened!"

Her husband gulped down a glass of cognac and said:

"Frightened! What is the use of being frightened now? Tony, you must be brave!"

He filled the other three glasses and smiled.

"You must drink! It will do you good!"

He filled his own glass again.

"Cognac I recommend as an excellent remedy in times of stress."

He raised his glass.

"Captain Selby, and you, Mr. Westcott, I dr-rink to your good healths!"

"Are you ready, Paul?" said the woman.

"If you take my advice, ma'm," said the captain, "you'll wait here till sunrise!"

"What hope would we have then?" said the woman. "None!"

"Suppose they're watching?" said Mr. Westcott.

"Wouldn't they be just as likely to be watching tomorrow, or the day after? You don't know them; I do. We must go. Any day now they'll learn that my husband bought this place five years ago in another name. He bought it in case—in case things went wrong! I wonder they've not been here weeks ago!"

Mr. Westcott saw in her eyes the reflection of his own fears. She knew, he was positive, that their enemies were waiting, watching the house, ready for them to emerge! Or did she still hope!

"Let's go!" she said hoarsely.

Her husband was drinking more cognac.

His face was an unwholesome pink color and damp. His eyes looked swollen and too large for their lids. He smiled with one side of his mouth.

"An automobile would not help," he said. "No. It must be on foot. Captain, do you know the way to the beach? I tell you. We go out the house the back door, t'rough the aloes and maybe along the ditch. It will be dry and I am thankful. And then—and then—"

He lifted his hands and let them fall to his sides again with a sudden gesture of despair.

"And what, after all, is the good?"

The woman went to him and kissed him.

"Dear Paul!" she said. "It's so hard on you! Terribly hard!"

"Ah, Tony!" he said. "And if I am killed, what will become of you?"

"You won't be killed!"

"Let's go," said the captain.

"Captain Selby," said the woman, "and you, Mr. Westcott, I want to warn you, it's going to be dangerous!"

"So dangerous," said the man, "that if they see me, they would rather kill all four than let me escape them!"

"I'm not afraid," said Mr. Westcott. "Hadn't we better push off?"

"My husband and I may not come out of this alive," said the woman. "I have a feeling that something has gone wrong. If anything happens, I want you to know how grateful I am for all you've done. Mr. Westcott, I wouldn't be here now but for you. I'd like to thank you."

She held his hand in hers and gazed straight into his eyes and he felt that she understood him and knew how happy he was to have been able to help, and whatever the danger, it would make no difference!

And then she gave her hand to Captain Selby.

Mr. Westcott heard her say under her breath—

"You bear no malice?"

"No malice."

"Forgiven?"

"All forgiven."

She sighed and dropped his hand.

Why forgiven? thought Mr. Westcott. He could fit no meaning to the words they had used. The night with all its hints, its suspicions, its sudden turns and twists, its evasions, had tired him and left his mind slow and sluggish.

"Let's go!" said the woman.

Her husband wrapped a cloak about him and put a broad brimmed hat on his head.

"Any luggage?" said Captain Selby.

"One suitcase," said the woman. "But we could do without even that, if we had to!"

"I'll carry it," said Mr. Westcott.

Alvarez had in his hand a brown leather dispatch-case. He said rather grimly:

"In here are some papers. You understand, Captain! Some very precious papers!"

"I'll go first," said Captain Selby. "You and your husband, ma'm, will come next. Mr. Westcott, you must act as a kind of rear guard! And let's pray they don't see us!" He had the clumsy looking automatic once more in his hand. "Señor Alvarez, are you armed?"

"I have a pistol, yes," said Alvarez. "I will use it!"

"Paul," said the woman, "you won't run any risks, will you?"

"I will fight," he said. "They will never take me alive!"

They stood at the back door and listened.

There was no sound audible but the far-off beat of the Pacific on the sandy beach and the breeze in the stunted trees between the house and the hedge of aloes. The sky was still clear but for a few fleecy clouds, the stars shone more brightly now than they had earlier in the night, the moon cast long black shadows of the trees across the wilderness that once had been a garden.

Captain Selby advanced slowly away from the house and stood looking from side to side.

He turned and said, rather sharply, or so Mr. Westcott thought—

"Come on, let's go!"

The woman and her husband, both wrapped in their long black cloaks, followed.

Mr. Westcott, feeling more and more worried and uneasy, closed the door softly and hurried after them through the tangle of weeds and brush, carrying the heavy suitcase. The thought flashed into his mind that some one was watching him. He glanced quickly eastward toward the shed and the low brick wall.

And then what he had feared came, without warning.

A man crept out of the shadows into the moonlight.

Mr. Westcott saw the pistol and heard his own voice utter a strangled yell—

"Captain Selby!"

He let the suitcase fall, stooped and picked up a stone which he hurled at the man with all his force as he fired.

After it was all over he felt that for a time he must have lost all control of himself.

Without in the least knowing what he proposed to do, he ran forward, shouting, conscious of the crack of pistols fired at close quarters and flashes of light from the shadows.

Alvarez raced toward the hedge of aloes, his cloak billowing out like wings, giving him the appearance of some monstrous bird. His wife stood motionless, her tall, lithe figure dark against the moonlight. She put her hands to her face and swayed on her feet and uttered a little cry.

Mr. Westcott reached her as she fell and caught her.

"Get down!" he heard Captain Selby shout. "Get down, both of you!"

He lowered her gently to the ground and held her in his arms and crouched over her, his body a shield against the bullets. He looked over his shoulder and saw Captain Selby out in the open, standing upright, shooting at the brush west of the garden where a man was kneeling shooting back at him. Another man, Mr. Wescott saw, supported himself on hands and knees and was crawling away, groaning. Yet another man must have been shooting, too, as a bullet hit the ground near them and sent the dust spurting up into his face. A little later he felt a heavy blow on the shoulder and knew that he was hit. The woman was bleeding. There was a flow of warm blood on his hand. She said in a faint voice—

"Paul!"

It was difficult to catch what she said.

"Paul's all right," said Mr. Westcott. Again he looked over his shoulder. He saw a man running away—two men—three. The noise of the shooting ceased suddenly. The silence bewildered him. He felt in a manner lost.

It took him some seconds of muddled thought for him to realize that he was still alive and no longer in danger and that there was no need for him to hold the woman in his arms and protect her from the bullets.

"They've gone!" he said. "Mrs. Alvarez, they've gone!"

Captain Selby came slowly toward them and dropped on to his knees by his side.

"Tony!" he said.

Mr. Westcott was cramped. The wound in his shoulder hurt.

"Take her," he said. "Do you mind?"

He rose to his feet, dizzily.

"Tony," said Captain Selby.

"Where's Paul?" she said in her faint whisper. "Why isn't he here with me?"

"Paul's quite safe, Tony."

She tried to sit up.

"Lie quite still, Tony! You're hurt!"

She seemed to recollect.

"Why, it's Jack! Listen, Jack, you promised! You gave your word that you'd save Paul, and you must!" Her voice broke into a sob. "You promised me. Where is he? What have you done with him?"

His left arm supported her. Her head with its mass of fair hair rested on his shoulder. His right hand took hold of her left.

"Paul!" she whispered. "Paul, dear!"

She sighed and her body relaxed. For a long time he did not move. Then very gently he laid her down.

"Poor old girl!" he said gruffly. "Had a tough time of it, didn't you? Not much help, was I?"

He stood up and stretched himself.

"——, I'm tired!"

"What does it all mean?" said Mr. Westcott.

"Nothing, except she's dead!"

Captain Selby stood looking down on the dead woman's face. Presently he turned.

"Let's see where her husband got to?"

He led the way toward the hedge of aloes and through a gap into a piece of waste land where they found him lying dead, bullet holes through his heart and forehead.

The brown leather case had disappeared.

"They got the papers, then!" said Mr. Westcott.

"Of course!" said Captain Selby. ""That's what they were after."

Between them they carried the dead man back into the garden and laid him down by the side of his wife.

"The —— swine ran and left her!" said Mr. Westcott bitterly. "He said he'd fight but he didn't! And his wife's dead!"

"She'd have been alive now but for me, probably," said Captain Selby. "Perhaps they saw me following you! Perhaps there was another man on guard, up at the house on the hill! Perhaps—"

He paused and seemed to be thinking. All at once he burst out fiercely:

"But, I ask you, how else could she have got away? How else? I don't believe—no—I don't believe there'd have been a chance!"

Again he paused and looked at Mr. Westcott and said almost humbly:

"I did my best, eh? You know I did!"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Westcott scarcely heard him. He was wondering now why the woman should look so calm, so happy, almost, lying dead. Was it because her troubles were over and she understood how little the world she had left mattered or what?

"It's terrible to die like that!" he said.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Captain Selby. "When my time comes, Mister, I'd as soon go the way she's gone as any other way."

"Well, sir, I call it wicked that a man and a woman who've done no real harm should have been killed because of their politics!"

"It was money killed these two, not politics! This man—" Captain Selby touched the dead body with his foot—"this man who called himself Alvarez—which wasn't his real name—was a thief! A financial genius, a wizard, if you like, but a crooked one! He bolted with all the money he could lay his hands on. God knows how many people he ruined! Thousands! I heard of the crash when we were lying at Barcelona two years ago. He'd bought property here in San Asensio, so as to be prepared. I came on his tracks in Liverpool last year. A letter written from San Asensio. I knew there were men who'd give anything almost to get word of him, and I knew it was only a matter of months before they found him. He couldn't escape. He was sentenced to death the day he vanished from Barcelona! He must have known it, too. So must his wife!"

"Captain Selby, how did you learn about this—this Alvarez?"

"I made it my business, Mr. Westcott," said the captain. "For reasons I had."

"Do you suppose she knew her husband was bad?"

"What difference would it have made, if she had! She loved him, didn't she? God knows why, but she did! Mr. Westcott, later on, perhaps, you'll learn that when a woman's in love with a man, it doesn't make any difference to her if he's the biggest scoundrel unhung! Decency or honesty don't weigh in the balance against love! Take it from me, Mr. Westcott, that's the truth! We needn't pity her because she's dead, either! If she'd lived and her husband had been killed, she'd never have known a day's happiness again, ever! If both of them had lived, she'd have found out in time that he didn't love her, and that would have broken her heart. It's tough, all the same! —— tough!"

The harsh, gruff voice shook.

"Poor old Tony, you've had a hard time of it, haven't you?"

He stooped and patted the white hand and then very gently drew the slack of her black cloak over the pale face.

"Cover the man, Mr. Westcott, for Heaven's sake!" he said. "I hate the sight of him! He's laughing!"

Mr. Westcott waited, awed by the emotion in one whom he had always despised for his insensibility to human suffering. He wondered why the death of this woman who was a stranger should have affected him so much!

Presently the captain turned once more.

"We'll have to rouse some one at the nearest farm and get them to go for the police," he said. "They heard the shooting—must have!"

"Captain Selby," said Mr. Westcott, "suppose the police think we had a hand in the killing!"

"They won't think anything of the kind when they hear who he is," said the captain. "They'll know who did it!"

Mr. Westcott thought for a while and then, rather timidly, he asked a question that had begun to trouble him.

"Captain Selby, there's just one thing more. I hope you won't think it impertinent of me—I don't mean it that way, I assure you!—but did you know her before?"

"Yes, Mr. Westcott, I knew her before. I did my best but I failed. The fault wasn't hers. She did what was right!"

Mr. Westcott heard the sound of feet shuffling along the dusty road.

"That will be the people from the next farm," said the captain. "Let me do the talking, Mr. Westcott. I speak Spanish!"

"Just one last question, Captain Selby!" He felt that if he did not ask now, another chance would not be given him. "How do you mean she did what was right?"

"Mr. Westcott, you're bleeding! Why didn't you say you were wounded! Here, let's have a look!"

"How do you mean she did what was right, sir?"

"She ran away!"

"Ran away! I don't understand!"

"Ran away from me ten years ago, Mr. Westcott. I never saw her again till to-night! She was my wife!"

Looking About

THERE can not, I fear, be even a small corner set aside for literary criticism, as the following letter suggests, but I need no urging to break a lance for the action story—for the action story, that is, at its best. There is sound reason why many lances should be broken for it, as Mr. Greene sets forth:

> Provincetown, Massachusetts.
>
> I suggest that you have some small corner devoted to literary criticism with the especial view to justify the action story. A little consideration of literature seems to me to show that the action story outlives all others. Stylists and sedentary critics demand other things, but the Odyssey will live, even through bad translations, longer than all the mere feats of word spinners. The action story depends on men and things and the fact remains that the classics are kept alive by translations and not by their effects of words which of course can only be felt by the reader of the originals.
>
> I would like to have some brief pugnacious replies to those who think American literature will head toward the Sherwood Anderson ideal to the exclusion of the O. Henry. Count Keyserling has shown how current Christianity, even in its most narrow characteristics, expresses the genius of America and will tend to help that genius more than the profundities of the Hindu. Could not something be done in that way by showing that even the crudest action story has in it more of what America is driving toward than all the sex cobwebs and paralytic futilities of the intelligentsia? Why not, for instance, show that all the best literature has a driving force and should be judged by the kind of men it makes?
>
> All this may seem very vague to you, but I would like to see the action story fight more for its rights.—J. H. GREENE.

THAT a story should be branded inferior because it contains action is ridiculous. Yet it is so branded by perhaps the majority of fairly discriminating readers. Their attitude is a natural result of faulty reasoning. Most crude stories and most crude writers depend upon action for chief interest. Upon this truth these fallacious reasoners go through a process akin to the "All iron is metal, therefore all metal is iron" syllogism and arrive at an equally absurd conclusion.

The action story at its worst is very bad indeed. So is an egg. But no one condemns eggs in general on that account.

One reason for the unintelligent prejudice against action is that most people take their literary assessments at second-hand from the professional critics. Many professional critics have neither adequate foundation and culture nor sufficient analytical judgment to warrant their speaking *ex cathedra.* Of the others practically all become more or less jaded. The normal in literature loses its appeal. To arouse their interest there must be something of the unusual. But the unusual is not necessarily literary. Neither is the abnormal. No more is action or anything else non-literary because it is usual.

Another reason for the prejudice is that our civilization has journeyed well on through history's cycle of strength, power, wealth, luxury, decay. We are decidedly more effete than were our fathers—or Homer. A civilization that produces lounge-lizards, makes candy, soda-water and chewing-gum one of its biggest items of expense and devotes its main endeavor to creating machinery to do its work for it can not retain a very healthy regard for the more vital things of either life or literature. Of which action is one. A large part of our population prefers the anemic, the bizarre, the unwholesome, the morbid.

Action not literary? Why, if handled with skill it becomes the highest and finest of literary material. As much so today as when Euripides, Sophocles *et al* found it worthy of hands at least as literary as those of our intelligentsia. For when action is the true product and result of character and situation it is the crystallization, the very distillation, of human psychology. And even the intelligentsia will not deny the extreme literaryness of human psychology.

Adventure has no brief for the story whose only appeal is action, nor does it demand action of the blood-letting variety. But wholesome action, logical outgrowth from character and situation, should need no briefs from anybody. Before any one attempts to look down upon stories containing action he should get closely into his mind the fundamental of literary criticism that it is not the presence of action—or of any other kind of literary material—that determines whether a story has literary merit.

When it comes to the broader aspect of

fiction in relation to life, of fiction as a shaper of morals and ideals, an American today should have the brains and courage to face some extremely serious problems in the selection of what should be read. He can not afford to be led blindly by jaded critics and their sheep followers. Sewers and brothels, photographic attempts at realism, glittering surface cleverness camouflaging nothingness, anemic or morbid psychology, exaggerated trivialities, all these are held up to him as the apparent mark and test of "class." If he thinks for himself he will not find them so. On the contrary he will recognize them as of no literary importance in themselves and as factors of decay or degeneration in our social fabric. He will know that his choice is between the clean and the unwholesome, the sincere and the artificial, the normal and the morbid, the vital and the anemic, the solid and the glittering shell.

And his choice made on this basis will be a safer guide to real literary quality than he may have suspected.

WE'RE going to get rid of a bad habit. Like most other magazines ours dates each issue a month ahead. In any given month you find on the news stands issues bearing the name of the next month ahead. For example, this issue is labeled December 8, but it went on sale November 8.

This confusing custom began a good many years ago. If one magazine appeared on sale June 28, another June 25 and others June 23, 21 and 20, the first one wasn't going on sale until all the others had put forth their new issues and the public had already pretty well stocked itself with magazines for the time being. The obvious remedy was to change its date of appearance from the 28th to the 19th, thus getting first chance at the monthly market. Very good, but the others could try the same game and presently, instead of appearing on the 23rd, 21st and so on, they began appearing on the 18th, 17th and so on. Gradually they worked back to the very first days of the month. And then, since there wasn't any earlier June day for the June issue to appear than June 1, the next step was to have the June issue appear May 31 or 30. By this time the June issues have worked pretty well back toward the first part of May.

It's confusing and rather ridiculous and *Adventure* is going to break away from this bad custom. There have already been some pioneers in this sane movement and soon the date on our own magazine is going to be the date on which it actually appears. We know, without asking, that our readers will endorse the change back to normal. The old ownership could not be persuaded to take this step but the new ownership are going to join the pioneers in getting things back to a simple and sensible basis.

WE DO so much drifting along. Things are handed down to us by our ancestors—they are here before we are, we grow up with them as fixed parts of the world that surrounds us and are likely to go through life considering them as accepted things needing no particular examination.

So with our schools. It is an age-old habit to brag about them, erect improved buildings, make changes in curriculum, texts and teaching methods. It is also an age-old habit to consider the low pay of teachers merely one of the things that are.

No good business man would dream of making such a tremendous investment in buildings and equipment and then offer such low wages for the operation of his plant that people with brains enough to handle the job would have too much brains to take it when on every side were better paying openings.

Yet that's what we do in our schools. If you have any doubts, ask the Bureau of Education in Washington for what data they have on the average salary of teachers clear up through college. Compare that average salary with the wages of skilled *and unskilled* labor including school janitors, and blush.

Some are born to teach and will not be stopped even by low pay, but for the most part that low pay entices only those too incompetent to meet competition in better paid fields. Good or bad, either they escape from it through marriage or better opportunity or else they remain and are shriveled into ever decreasing efficiency by a narrowing life that can afford little or none of the enrichment and broadening needed to equip them for their profession. Those are the brutal facts. Digest them.

To make matters worse there is a

growing insistence by school authorities that teachers shall have or acquire masters' and doctors' degrees. In primary and secondary schools that is grotesque folly. Degrees do not make good teachers. The time, effort and money expended in getting them might do so if turned into saner channels.

That teachers manage to be as good as they are is a miracle. They deserve our respect equally with our pity.

If we were not so boastful of our school system this stupidity of inadequate pay would not be so glaring. But we recognize, at least in a dim way, that the education of our children is one of the most important things in life, that the future of our nation depends upon the shaping of these coming generations. We yearly spend prodigious sums on buildings and equipment, which are the mere tools for education—and then skimp inefficiently in securing workmen able to use these tools competently. Penny-wise and pound-foolish, we fail to get the dividends due us.

Here are the people upon whom depends the practical efficiency of our whole tremendous investment in schools. Here are the people under whom our children spend a major portion of their waking time. Here are the people to whom we entrust the shaping of our coming generations, the future of our country. And we are idiots enough to expect good results from wages that put teaching well down toward the foot of the list of all our professions, businesses, trades and unskilled employments!

That tragic absurdity, for which we and the future must pay a heavy bill, is one of the Dead Sea fruits of our materialistic civilization. Our vaunted efficiency experts don't seem to have noticed anything wrong at this vital point.

By any sane assessment of relative values teaching is probably the most important activity in our complex social fabric. We reward it as if it were the least important.

And what are you going to do about it? Just drift along some more? A. S. H.

AN EDITOR'S woes are many. So are other people's, but every fellow likes to talk about his own. Here I've been for years insisting on the custom of using dashes instead of cusswords. Oh yes, I know all the objections. Believe me, I know them! Been hearing them for years, but after most careful consideration, and backed by many readers, it still seems the best way of handling the situation for this particular magazine. And in reading over our October 23rd issue, after it was too late for changes, I ran into two standard cusswords instead of the dashes that should have been there! Maybe there were more. I was afraid to read farther.

I've read and said cusswords before and managed to survive, but that didn't lessen the anguish of finding them where they were very particularly supposed not to be. For all I know there may be some in later issues. I clamor to make known that any such occurrence is a mistake, an oversight, an accident. Every time a new editor joins the staff we have to go through a period of uncertainty until he's learned to use dashes, learned not to let a character hit another gentleman with the butt of a revolver instead of its barrel, learned that there's a limit to the weight of money a character can lift and carry, learned a lot more things like that. Well, this new editor hadn't learned about the dashes or rather, hadn't got into the habit of mind that never misses fire on that point. I make at least as many mistakes as any other member of the staff, except maybe when they're very new, so I can only lament in this case.

WORSE still, in that same issue I talked at length about a certain word in one of our stories on the basis of its use being of extremely rare occurrence in our pages. And then, doggone it, the same word appeared in another story in that same issue, and doubtless took most of the wind out of my sails.

Editors have a hard time. One trouble is that people expect them to be infallible. Well, this one isn't and can't off hand recall any that are. Our staff is a good staff but there is no infallible prodigy on it. So when you damn us—no, I'm not using it as a cussword—please damn us on a percentage basis. Figure out first that in each issue of a magazine there are, literally, thousands of chances for its editors to make mistakes, and then give the poor editors a little credit for those they don't make. Very few editors make 'em all.

Don't insist on an editor being executed until his percentage of mistakes gets really dangerously high. Let 'em live a while. Somebody's got to be editors.—A. S. H.

A *free-to-all* Meeting-Place

The Camp

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship

WHO can give us more information concerning this cave in Nevada or the cliff dwellings in the general neighborhood of Death Valley?

Washington, D. C.

In a September issue, I note interesting communications from Mrs. G. M. Bridgham and Mr. Woodward regarding Indian caves and inscriptions in the desert region of California and Nevada. It may be of interest to note the existence of an Indian cave just off the old wagon road from Sodaville to Tonopah, Nevada. It is a short distance from a spring, the only one in the entire sixty-five miles of desert, midway between the two places named. The chief interest to me was the evidence in the shape of numerous chips of obsidian that it had been used as a workshop for the manufacture of arrow-heads, knives, etc., from that material, coupled with the fact that so far as I could ever learn the nearest deposit of volcanic glass is in Lake County, California, several hundred miles north. My recollection is that there were paintings on the protected rock surfaces, but only a very limited time was available for investigation, while my visit took place twenty-five years ago—in the spring of 1901.

I am wondering whether any of your readers could throw any light upon an account of the discovery of some cliff dwellings in the vicinity of Ash Meadows, more or less contiguous to Death Valley, made by a "desert rat" who brought the information to San Bernardino, where I made it the subject of a short article in the newspaper with which I was then connected—some forty-five years ago. I have been trying to "run down" the story in this city, but find that none of the Governmental bureaus dealing with such matters has any information regarding it. The prospector who told me the yarn had no reason for "stuffing" me, but merely mentioned it as an interesting incident of desert travel. Perhaps some reader of *Adventure* may know of this matter, in which case I shall be glad to correspond with him, and exchange desert lore, of which I have quite an accumulation, gained in fifty years of acquaintance.—G. F. WEEKS.

for Readers, *Writers and Adventurers*

Fire

has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOMETHING from Harold Lamb concerning the real history underlying his complete novelette in this issue:

Berkeley, California.

The *koshevoi* of the wolves is an old Cossack legend and is undoubtedly based on some actual happening. Just what it was no one knows. The Cossacks, by the way, used to call the wolves "gray friends" and the picture of St. Ulass and the wolf may still be seen in their churches.

AS FOR the False Dmitri—he is one of the weirdest figures of history. His character is summed up very well by one historian, Ustrialof, in these words: "Since he was the head of many tsardoms that had submitted to the Russian scepter, not being satisfied with the title of tsar he took the name of emperor. . . . But while he understood the necessities of the empire, he did not understand his own situation. He aroused against himself universal hatred, and the annals hint at unheard-of crimes and call him by the name of God-detested man."

An adventurer, who made himself a great emperor, aided by no more than his own wit; a man of unknown origin, who revealed real ability to rule when he had stolen the throne, and might have made the best of monarchs, except for one thing. Himself.

As to what befell him in the Terem that night, it is one of the secrets of medieval Russia. And about the most reliable account of the events of that night is the journal of Captain Margeret, French soldier of fortune.

The events are related in the story as *Margeret* and *Bertrand* told them—the mystery of the three missing horses, the beard on the dead man that did not look as if it had been shaved before then, the letter to the *boyare* and all the rest. Basmanof and Tevakel Khan and Ilbars Sultan were living men, and the raid of the Turkomans on the Golden Horde took place about this time—though the name of the Turkoman chieftain is not known to me.

AS TO the legend of the Earth Girdle—it bobs up in Europe, Persia and Arabia. In Europe, at least as late as 1630, it is the "Cingulus Mundi," and in the tale of Abou Ishak it is the mountain Câf. I have in my library a map published by Petit de la Croix about 1710 that shows a single mountain barrier stretching down mid-Asia and this barrier is named Câf.

Modern exploration has cleared up the geography of high Asia sufficiently to show that this "rampart" is in reality a system of many mountain ranges extending northeast from Afghanistan to Lake Baikal, rather than north and south.

But there are regions behind the Gobi still unexplored, and one chap, Thomas Atkinson, observed some curious ruins above Lake Zaizan Nor—the ruins that appear in the story as the city of the Golden Horde (which once ruled the country).

ATKINSON saw a granite plateau standing out of a mountain range, and observed on nearer approach that the mass was in reality a number of isolated rock bulks that had the appearance of the ruined edifices of a vast city.

At least one ruin in this place was man-made—and during an earlier age—an enclosure nearly half a mile in length, surrounded by a wall of large stone blocks with smaller fitted between. Some portions were six feet high and seven thick. Where the wall was no more than two feet, Atkinson jumped his horse over it, and his two Cossacks followed him, but nothing could induce the native Kirghiz to enter the ruin. They rode around and waited for him on the other side.

They explained that the ruins—which had the appearance of fortifications, towers, and pyramids—were the abode of "Shaitan" and it was not healthy to graze herds near by after dusk.

The Kirghiz are descendants of the Golden Horde. There are many such basalt and limestone formations in the *loess* regions of Central Asia, and plenty of abandoned cities, the prey of encroaching sands, plague or invasion. And the ruins of nature are often similar to the ruins left by men.—Harold Lamb.

ANOTHER of our writers' brigade has been taken from us. Charles Victor Fischer, Jr. of Newark, New Jersey, was struck by an automobile August twenty-eighth, suffering a fractured skull, a broken leg and internal injuries. During twenty-three days in the hospital he fought gamely for life but pneumonia developed and he died September twentieth. Camp-Fire rises to its feet to wish him God-speed over the Long Trail.

On the Memorial Tablet in our reception-room, erected by the readers, writers, artists and editors of our magazine to those who have helped in its making, the list of names carved there grows longer. Within a year three of our writers' brigade have been killed by automobiles and a gentler death takes its steady toll. Yet, since it covers sixteen years, the list is not a long one. And happily among the new comrades constantly joining us around our Camp-Fire there are always some to step into the vacant places. That does not make us forget those who can no longer be with us in the work or talk with us around the fire.

FROM Richard H. Watkins a few words concerning the Scilly Isles and his story in this issue:

Riverside, Connecticut

Nobody seems to know much about the Scilly Isles and I don't recall ever having seen a magazine story about them, so when I heard about them from a liner captain I decided to look them up. "East of the Bishop" is the result. One of the principal decorations of the great garden of the Lord of the Manor is a long row of figureheads which have drifted to the islands from ships wrecked on the Western Rocks, and after I had made a trip or two in a small boat among those same rocks I realized why the collection is probably the largest in the world.—R. H. Watkins.

OUR Camp-Fire is essentially a place for frankness and openness. If any one talks to us he is expected to stand up in the light of the blaze and say his say. We don't pay much attention to unknown voices back in the bushes beyond the light of our fire and of course when a masked man steps forward into the light and talks we're not going to give him a great deal of confidence or attention.

In other words, when any comrade feels like talking to us we expect him to do so in his own proper person—to talk over his own full name. There has been for years a bit of Camp-Fire common law against anonymous talkers except in cases where the omission of the name is obviously warranted, and such cases are comparatively very few. From now on we're going to enforce that custom much more rigidly.

Before any of the letters intended for Camp-Fire reach my hands another member of the staff will go over them and very carefully discard all letters whose writers ask that their names be not published in full. These will never even reach my hands. Even the few exceptional cases will be scanned more severely than ever before—

officers of the law the publishing of whose names might interfere with their official duties: convicts, whose desire for anonymity is understood and forgiven: Army and Navy officers, though only in certain cases: a very, very few other special cases that will gain at least a second thought when the discarding is done.

So, if you have something to say to Camp-Fire we'll be glad to hear *you*, but not your initials or a fictitious name. If you are not willing to talk over your own name, save yourself the trouble of writing a letter that will never even come to my eyes.

There are so many interesting letters from comrades entirely willing not to be anonymous that we can't find sufficient space to publish all of them. It certainly is not fair to crowd out any of these to make room for anonymous talkers.

Right here I tender an apology. In moving our offices to better quarters in another part of the Butterick Building, Mr. Cox and Miss Murray became infected with a desire to get rid of the superfluous things of one kind or another that had accumulated during the years. Of which there were quite, quite some. I have all the instincts of a miserly pack-rat, it wrung my heart to see these old landmarks disappear and I argued in their defense. On the whole, common sense was on their side and I retired with what dignity I could on "Well, on your own heads be it. If anything very much needed turns up missing after your house-cleaning, it will be up to you to get us out of the situation as best you can."

After we were all settled in our new offices something turned up missing and jolted the whole editorial works. To wit, all the carefully saved letters for Camp-Fire that had come in during 1926. A few only, tucked away in my own desk, remained. In the cache are plenty of letters prior to 1926 and of course those now coming in are being all the more carefully gone over. But most of the letters for eight months are victims of house-cleaning. It is with regret not unmixed with I-told-you-so joy that I present the apologies of Miss Murray and Mr. Cox. No feeling of staff loyalty restrains one from telling you to take it out of their hides, not mine.

But all that does not in the least affect our thumbs-down policy on letters whose writers expect to talk at Camp-Fire without being fully seen. Despite the house-cleaning tragedy set forth above, there are plenty of letters from comrades talking over their own names. Don't waste time and ink writing a letter to Camp-Fire and then asking that only your initials, or some other name, be published with it.

ONLY earnest persuasion by us in the office prevailed upon F. R. Buckley not to sign a pen-name to "The Way of Sinners." As his following letter makes clear, he had been forced to write, under his own name, many stories that were quite consciously potboilers and, having fought his way to where he could write as he pleased, he feared that under his own name his sins would rise against him to the prejudice of this present novel. But the facts are that those other stories were not so bad as he believed, and that there were among them, as we of Camp-Fire know, certain ones that he wrote as he liked and that will be remembered when the others are forgotten.

The following frank letter from him was written when he expected that his real identity would be concealed but the altered circumstances did not make him desert his guns. While this is not the comprehensive kind of biography with which, by our new custom, we close each Camp-Fire, it serves the essential of making author and reader better acquainted.

> Speaking of the mere writing of this story—the tapping of it out upon a machine—it was started at the Château de Pardigon, overlooking the Mediterranean, in France; continued at 13 rue Leriche, up near the fortifications on the rue de Vaugirard, in Paris; some of it was written on an Atlantic liner; and it was finished in Connecticut, during a bitter blizzard. The machine was one of the usual variety, though battered from its travels; and its stand was the packing-case in which it has been thrown on and off the trains, boats, and airplanes of six nations during the past five years.
>
> ACTUALLY, of course, the writing began when I was the age of *Francesco Vitali* at the beginning of his autobiography; by which I would not be understood to claim the story as the tale of my own life. All that I do claim for it is that it is sincere; that I have put everything into it of my own experience which will at present consent to come forth in story form; that I have not compromised on statements for fear of unpopularity, nor sensationalized them for notoriety's sake. Therefore, as the measure of much of my beliefs as I can put on paper, the book is autobiographic. There will be those who say "Ah? Then of a —— poor man."
>
> I can only say that, put back at the beginning, and forewarned that this verdict would be rendered by the Universe unanimously, I would start the long labor of this book again tomorrow.

AND it is a long labor, in one mode or in another; some authors work physically, writing and rewriting, polishing and repolishing, casting and recasting; others sit down, doing nothing for months at a time save call themselves lazy devils, slack-backed good-for-nothings, self-indulgent blighters and similar pretty names, until the stuff that has been fermenting below the surface all the time bursts forth and seems to write itself. It doesn't matter which mode is mine—they are equally hard; nothing is born without pain. And there is more pain in this business of writing than meets the eye—especially the eye of the poor folk who think authorship is an affair of an adventure, pen, ink, and a correspondence course. For while a story may take a month, a year, ten years to write, and block all other activity while it is being written, the author's stomach demands its tribute at the usual times. He must finance himself, for his stock-in-trade can not be inventoried by a banker; obviously, while so doing, he must manufacture his product, for if he fails no one else can do it; and at last he must go forth and be his own salesman.

But the point is this: he suffers from an evil unknown to other crafts, in that if he has made his product too good, the market for it is utterly closed to him. Magazines and publishing houses are in the business, obviously, to make money. They know what sort of stuff has made money for them in the past—what has pleased the readers and—more important still—raised no kick from the big advertisers. If in the past, then probably in the future. Ninety-nine magazine editors out of a hundred will give you a perfectly cold-blooded list of what "goes" and what does not. The "pick-up story," for instance, "goes." This is the confection in which a handsome young man becomes friendly with a pretty young girl without an introduction, but under circumstances which prove she is entirely virtuous. Finally he marries her. It is a story to which no one could object; but in the name of God, could anybody positively like it; could it do anybody any good; is it worth the paper on which it is printed? Is the writing of it work for a man who, if he knows enough to make a preposition govern the objective case, must surely also know that all women are not virtuous, that all men are not honorable virgins, and that matrimony is not the inevitable outcome of chance encounters in the street?

There is an article in the Commination: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark."

I state it and leave it at that. A word to the wise is enough; and for the benefit of the rest, I am not going into a discourse on the Influence of Popular Literature on the Young.

SINCE an author must live, he must do what men of all other trades must do—live by suiting his product to his known market until such time as he has gathered enough strength to argue with his customers. He writes pick-up stories, therefore, and tries to fancy himself happy in the resultant Cadillac. By which I would not be understood to pour retroactive scorn on my *Bill Garfield* stories, which have always been, and still are, of my current best.

But here is my main point—his customers are not the readers of the magazine. The readers do not buy his stories; the editor does that; the readers merely buy the magazine which the editor has made from the material of his own selection. The readers can not—or at all events, do not—invent, and tell the editor, what stories they would like to be told. All he has to go on is his record of what readers have stood for in the past; what has failed to make anybody angry.

It is my contention, supported by certain rare editors, that the man equipped to tell the readers the stories they want to hear is the author. To suit his tale to his audience is part of his trade; as may be seen any day in the bazars of Tunis, Algiers—any hot, sunny town with white walls and a smell of sandal-wood. The story-teller sits down and his boy beats the tom-tom; but does the boy (his advertising manager), or does the headman of the sôk, select the tale? No; watch the story-teller else, while he drones the invocation of Allah, running his sharp eyes over the faces of the crowd. Once he has made his decision as to their mood, his task is simple—he knows all his stories by heart; a *conte* of war, mystery, love or the supernatural rolls forth from him without effort, gestures and all complete. His success is in some measure due to his skill; in greater measure to his natural gift, which is to say, his power of sincere belief in what he tells these strangers; but in far the greatest part, to the correctness of his judgment as to what his audience desires. There is no rule of thumb for this last. What "went" twenty minutes ago, with a crowd containing just as many women, just as many men, just as many beggars, just as many merchants, just as many boys and fleas, as this one, will not go now, when, for instance, the sun has gone behind a cloud, or a camel has started to complain three streets away. The true story-teller feels his audience in his blood—that is why he tells stories.

Things are different when the sôk is a magazine. That goes without saying; but principles are the same. I will say no more about this, either. A word to the wise is enough; and for the benefit of the rest, I am not going into any discourse on the strangle-hold of the advertising manager on American literature.

THIS story, "The Way of Sinners," has been long conceived; it has been my opinion these ten years that, while some would detest it, the majority who read it would—be glad. I may be wrong, but I do not think so. For ten years I tried to write it, and failed; at first because my craftsmanship was not sufficient, and latterly because, having gathered responsibilities with the course of time, I could not afford to. At last, desperate, I went to a publisher and implored him, on the strength of my reputation for pick-up stories and such-like, to subsidize me; give me a chance to show what I could do when I was let loose. He agreed; and the subsidy, which would have lasted me five weeks in America, supported me in France during the whole writing of the novel. The flesh-pots were not up to the American standard, but during the second stage of the writing I was happier than I have been in my life, so far—not so far, really; for I am happier on the day I write this.

The first stage of the writing was disastrous—I had conceived the story in a modern setting; and I found that in that setting I could not write it. There is no use in detailing agonies, and I pass them by. But there will be some among the readers hereof who may remember a story of mine in which two men fought on a catapult platform, high above a moat. That catapult-platform exists to this day, though the moat is filled up; not in Italy, but in France, at Grimaud in Provence, a castle that was burned down four hundred years ago, but of which the ruins are enough to intoxicate a man with imagination and a knowledge of the period. Grimaud, and Gassin, and Cogolin, with Ramatuel to cut in on the flank, were forts built to keep the Moors out of the South of France. They are ruined now, but they have not been restored, or torn down—the lazy South has left them as they were. A man can go to Grimaud and put his elbows on the sill of the lower window of the south-tower and look down on the fortified town; and, imagining himself in command of that tower's guard, try to pick out his sweetheart from among the girls who pass below.

IT MAY sound silly, but in my despair I did this, just this; and this book is the result. Behind me, in the wall of the tower, was the niche of the fireplace; four hundred years ago men in armor had just the same need to be warm as we have. Behind me again was the roofless banqueting-hall, with its secretly supplied water-tank still full; four hundred years ago men ate and drank much as they do today. Above, sprouting with five or six young plane-trees from the wall, were the carved corbels that once upheld the beams of the upper floor, where my lord and my lady slept; four hundred years ago, men grew weary at the end of the day just as we do in this year of our Lord God—and there are descendants of the Counts of Grimaldi in Provence even now.

It seemed to me, suddenly, looking out on the Gulf of St. Tropez, up which the Moorish galleys used to come, that since the facts of life were equally the facts of life four hundred years ago, and the method of acting on them so much simpler than in this present age, it might be better to lay my story in a period which, strangely enough, I understand better than I do this twentieth century. I would not willingly take the life of any human being; but if a man hates another, his action is to me more logical if he kills him than if he sues him for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars or tries to bear the stock-market against him. Furthermore, if I am to read about a man for my pleasure—and the only object of fiction as fiction is to give pleasure, though incidentally it may do other things as well—I would sooner have my man in armor and velvet than in a pepper-and-salt suit.

Which is to say, I think my readers would sooner—

THE writing of one hundred thousand words concerning a period known, of necessity, only through books and manuscripts most of which do not exist in the English translation, is a task. I was conscious, moreover, when I commenced that in casting the story in this, which seemed to me the most effective mould, I was taking a bitter risk. The serial rights of a book are, except in the case of rare best-sellers, the largest source of income from the work. I knew that there was one magazine in the world which might run the story in its present form—*Adventure*. And I knew more and more clearly, as the story progressed and women began to appear among its characters, that it was losing more and more its chance of being published in *Adventure*. There was a period when, desperately, I debated whether or not to cut down on what I wanted to say, to defeat my own purpose in writing the book, in order to increase my chances of making a large sum of money. Consciously, I decided to do this, so that there is no credit due me for a moral victory; but, having taken the decision, I could no longer write the book. There was a month of agony. Then I went on with the original plan.

At last it was finished—finished as it stands now; I corrected the last misprint on the three hundred and sixty-seventh page and turned it over to my typist. There was a wait of ten days; another wait of a month while the publishers who had subsidized me considered it; and then, very kindly and with every care for my feelings, they told me that they could not undertake its publication. The period when medieval romances were in fashion was past.

I repeated what I had said before—that it was not a medieval romance, but a modern novel, dealing with today in the outcome of yesterday, and applying even to tomorrow. But a man in armor is medieval; and medieval romances are no longer popular.

Another publisher said the same thing; and another; and another. My English publisher joined in the chorus. No medieval romance had succeeded was the consensus, since such-a-one, in such a month, of such a year; and whatever I might say, this was a medieval romance, because the men wore velvet.

Meanwhile, the script was with *Adventure*. I leave Mr. Hoffman to go into details if he choose to do so; but, as bald fact, the entire editorial staff itched to buy it despite its ostentatious flouting of standards which had served them well in the past; and it was reluctantly—rejected.

There was nothing more I could do; I returned to France and began to demand in my sleep what the —— use it was to try to do anything better. Stick to the good old pick-up story, live on the fat of the land, and have no more personal grief when your product is scorned than does H. Ford, Esq. over a car whose paint blisters.

Then the face of nature changed; a letter was handed to me as I sat drinking beer on the quay at Toulon, with a Colonel of Tirailleurs on my right hand, and an Arab *caid* on my left. *Adventure* was buying the story. It is before you now.

THE only remark I have to make concerning it technically is that it does not pretend to be a historical novel, except impressionistically. By which I mean that while the comings and goings of armies in the story are not intended to correspond with real wars of the period, the effect produced by them does correspond with the spirit of the country and of the time. Rometia and Savello are imaginary places; I have not stated the period—though there is one minor detail in the story that would, to an expert, date the action within twenty years; my aim has been to give a composite picture as effectively as possible, and with this in view (and, of course, barring anachronisms) I have not scrupled to mention Venice, Mantua, Siena, and Leghorn out of their historial settings.

That's all, except that in this screed, as in the story itself, I have permitted myself the luxury of concealing nothing important—except the name of the solitary man who failed to call me an ass for risking something new and untried. He would slay me if I mentioned him.—F. R. BUCKLEY.

Ask

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

General Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere

STRAIGHT

A News Bulletin of Outdoor Equipment

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World

Fish in the Philippines

THERE are plenty of them in the Islands, though the abalone mentioned in the request seems to be in retirement.

Request:—"I have recently been informed that abalones are abundant along certain parts of the Northern Luzon coast. I am established here, grinding and polishing abalone shells and I shall be greatly obliged for any answers you may give to the following:

Presuming that abalones are found in the Philippines, what are the varieties—red, green, black, etc.?

Are they abundant?

Localities?

Are there any commercial abalone canning or drying factories in the Philippines? Firm names and addresses?

May the meats and shells be exported from the Philippines? Export duties?

Are the abalones taken at low tide or is deep diving necessary? Native or foreign divers?

I shall appreciate any other information you may give me on this subject. Thanking you again."—BEN F. BAKER, Moss Landing, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Connor:—I have had yours of March 26th, for some time—it inadvertently got mixed up and lost from my files—I apologize for unavoidable delay. But will say in answer to your inquiry:

1. The Philippines abound in fishes, and fishing industry will sooner or later demand attention from those interested in it. At present, according to latest reports, the amount of fish caught is not enough to meet local needs.
2. There is no adequate means for deep-sea fishing—mostly all shallow-water work.
3. The species are: Anchovies, herrings, pompanos, sea basses, mullets, milkfishes, barracudas, porgies, grunts, parrot and soldier fishes.
4. Fish values at more than 5,000,000 pesos were imported last year according to statistics. Manila alone consumed about 4,000,000 pesos worth of dried, smoked, pickled and fresh fish annually.
5. Raw materials for canning industry are

Adventure

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Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

available. Oil for preserving purposes, especially coconut oil has been found to possess good qualities for canning. There is oyster and other shellfish that can be profitably exploited.

6. Export duties, if any, are so small it matters not on fishes. Abalones do not seem to be classified by the Bureau of Fisheries.

An Old Mexican Book

AN INVENTORY is not always dull and uninteresting. This one throws a glamourous, although not too illuminating, light upon the book from which it was taken.

Request:—"As a long-time reader of *Adventure* I take the liberty of enclosing a copy of handwriting, which I assume to be Mexican, taken from an old book, with the hope that you may be able to make at least a rough translation into English.

With the knowledge that I may be taking more of your time than the circumstances appear to warrant, it occurs to me that a brief description and history of the book referred to may interest you.

In size, the book measures about 9 inches by 14 inches of apparently a hand-made paper, watermarked with the word "ROME," over which appears a crown and three crosses worked into a design.

The binding is evidently of carefully cured sheepskin, fastened with a leather thong and leather hasp.

The first four pages contain very fine handwriting, of which the enclosed is but a part. The back of the book contains many pages dealing with the "Sick List" and "Guard Roster" of Company "I," at Mexico City, Puebla and Voltigeno, Mexico, during the year 1848. No mention is made of what State this company hails from, although the list of members is apparently complete throughout. Another interesting page contains a diagram drawing, in pencil, over the caption, "Baltimore—Maryland, Mob Town." It would appear that the book was not only used during at least a part of the Mexican War, but for some purpose, during the Civil War.

Taking it all in all, a most interesting book.

The Mexican (?) writing is divided into eight divisions—the part I enclose being the subject matter under 'Mesita' Divisions as follows: Plata—Ropa — Madeia — Mesita — Otra Mesita — Otros Muebles—Papeteo—Coxuenteo.

Any assistance you may be able to extend relative to the translation of the enclosed you may be sure will be appreciated."—MYRON S. WALDEN, Providence, R. I.

Reply, with translation by Mr. Sheets:—The enclosed script is some kind of an inventory—probably looted from a church; it might have been prepared by some official about to take charge of a church. It might have been written anywhere and throws no light on the book you found it in.

Inventory and delivery list which to him—, (a verb is missing—may have been "*was given*").

A small table with tapestry (cover) of cloth of gold and tassel (or fringe) of same.

Two silver candlesticks.

A small box, or chest, lined with carmine velvet, ornamented with heavy silver, binding tape of silver with small pocket of green taffeta silk.

A cross of (the Order of) Jerusalem, with gilded edges.

A crucifix of Indulgences, with cross of fine word with I N R I (?) and edges of gilded silver, and a little lamb of heavy gilded silver at the foot of said image.

A pedestal stand of silver veneer; center of (Pato—error in copy) wax of Agnus (a wax cake blessed by the pope: this does not make sense, but it is the correct translation of the copy), its niche of scarlet velvet.

A towel and a small handkerchief, or cloth (for use in communion ceremony).

A pedestal stand of heavily gilded silver; with niche of leather.

A spool of heavily gilded silver with a tin box or case.

Several (word undecipherable) of gold.

An altar hanging of white linen and an altar cloth of cloth-of-gold; dust cover of dark red with gold lace; cover or rough brown cloth; a small box without key, and its altar (?).

Am sorry if this answer is disappointing.

Santo Domingo

THE queries asked here about this Central American republic are pretty general and inclusive, but they received answers which covered them all. But it is best to be specific.

Request:—"I wish to know all that I can find out about Santo Domingo, people, languages, mining, minerals and lumber.

A New York company is starting a turpentine outfit there and I hope to be there in about six months. Their shipping port is Monte Cristi, so the surrounding country is of most interest to me. I understand that the U. S. Government controls the custom offices of the country and that they do not admit firearms."—CLAUDE H. FLICK. Jackson, Michigan.

Reply, by Mr. Emerson:—Letter of August 27th received.

The people of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) are a mixed race of European and Indian blood with *considerable* intermingling. There has also been some mixing with the descendants of the negroes who were brought to the republic in earlier days. A fact worthy of note is that there are many Syrians and Turks in this republic, the dry goods trade being practically dominated by these nationals. Merchants of other nationalities are also established throughout the island.

The country is traversed by four nearly parallel mountain ranges. There are numerous fertile valleys, and the difference in altitude produces the various climates the traveler encounters.

While the climate is tropical, it is pleasant and one might say "salubrious." Although it is very warm during the middle of the day, the temperature even in summer seldom reaches 90 degrees Fahrenheit. The nights at all seasons are cool and pleasant.

The climate is tempered by trade winds, which blow almost continuously during the day, and at night the land breeze furnishes fresh air enough to satisfy anybody. The average annual temperature of the coast towns is 79 degrees Fahrenheit. It is cooler inland at higher altitudes.

The seasons—In the southern part of the island there is a marked difference between the dry and rainy season. It is dry in September to March. Wet from April to August. From early December until June there is very little rain. In the northern half it rains more or less all the year, the heaviest from November to April.

Chief crop is sugar, and the production is increasing each year, the mills are constantly enlarging their operations. Second in importance is cacao (from which chocolate is made), which is rapidly developing into a large industry. Another important crop is tobacco, and corn production is increasing in importance. Other products are bananas, beeswax, coffee, coconuts, honey, etc. The raising of cattle is making some progress. Export of hides, goatskins, etc., is increasing.

Mineral wealth—The republic is very rich in minerals, but up to the present they have not been exploited. The native is not in sympathy with progressive American methods.

The forests are exceedingly important, and the outlook for the exploiting of these is promising. The chief woods are lignum-vitæ and mahogany.

The language is Spanish.

Currency—The standard is the gold dollar, equal to the dollar of U. S. A. The Dominican peso is one-fifth of the gold dollar. This peso and its subdivisions are relatively at this rate of exchange. U. S. money circulates freely at its face value.

The metric system of weights and measures prevails.

Letter postage is two cents each one-half ounce. From the United States, however, our domestic postal rates govern. There is also a parcel-post for packages up to twenty-two lbs. at twelve cents per lb. but *no money orders* are *issued* or *redeemed*.

There is cable communication with the United States via Cuba, and Porto Rico.

The Clyde Steamship Co. office, 25 Broadway, N. Y. City. Sailings are from Pier Thirty-four, Atlantic Basin, Brooklyn, N. Y. Departures every other Saturday for Turks Island, Monte Cristi, Puerto Plata, Sanchez, San Pedro de Marcoris, Santo Domingo City and Barahona (sugar headquarters).

I can not give you any facts relative to "turpentine" in Santo Domingo, as that is something yet to be proven in practise.

Our experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Cover Your Ground**—Make questions definite. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next section.)*—Beriah Brown, Coupeville, Wash.

The Sea Part 2 *British waters. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.*—Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 3 *Statistics of American Shipping. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.*—Harry E. Riesberg, Apartment 347-A Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C.

Islands and Coasts Part 1 *Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (See next section.)*—Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

Islands Part 2 *Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.*—Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Islands Part 3 *Cuba. Geography, industries, people, customs, hunting, fishing, history and government.*—Wallace Montgomery, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba.

★ **New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands** *Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sports. (Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*—Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★ **Australia and Tasmania** *Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*—Phillip Norman, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

Malaysia, Sumatra and Java *(Editor to be appointed.)*

★ **New Guinea** *Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. Armit, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia.

Philippine Islands *History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.*—Buck Connor, L. B. 4., Quartzsite, Ariz.

Hawaiian Islands and China *(Editor to be appointed.)*

Japan Sidney Herschel Small, San Raphael, Calif.

Asia Part 1 *Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.*—Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 2 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.*—Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St,. New York.

Asia Part 3 *Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters. Natives, languages, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.*—Capt. C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure.*

★ **Asia Part 4** *North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.*—George W. Twomey, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China.

Africa Part 1 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria. (Editor to be appointed.)*

★ **Africa Part 2** *Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sports.*—Charles Beadle, La Roseraie, Cap d'Ail (Alpes Maritimes), France.

Africa Part 3 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.*—Captain F. J. Franklin, Gulfport and Coast Enquiry Depot, Turnbull Bldg., Gulfport, Miss.

✠ **Africa Part 4** *Portuguese East. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.*—R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada.

Africa Part 5 *Morocco. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.*—George E. Holt, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.*—Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.*

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

Africa Part 7 *Egypt, Tunis, Algeria.* (*Editor to be appointed.*)

✠**Africa Part 8** *Sudan. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history.*—W. T. Moffat, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Turkey *Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.*—J. F. Edwards, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y.

Asia Minor (*Editor to be appointed.*)

Bulgaria, Roumania (*Editor to be appointed.*)

Albania *History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.*—Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C.

Jugo-Slavia and Greece *History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.*—Lieut. William Tenna, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z.

Scandinavia *History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.*—Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C.

Finland, Lapland and Russia *History, customs, travel, shooting, fishing, big game, camping, climate, sports, export and import, industries, geography, general information. In the case of Russia, political topics, outside of historical facts will not be discussed.*—Aleko E. Lilius, care *Adventure.*

Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Hungary—Theodore von Keler, 153 Waverly Place, New York City.

✠**Great Britain** *General information.*—Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.*—Edgar Young, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.*—Paul Vanorden Shaw, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N. Y.

South America Part 3 *Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.*—Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern and Lower California. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.*—C. R. Mahaffey, Box 304, San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche. Inhabitants, history and customs; archeology, topography, travel and explorations, business conditions, exploitation of lumber, hemp, chewing gum and oil.*—W. Russell Sheets, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

✠**Canada Part 1** *Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sports, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.*—S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel.*—Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing; farm locations, wild lands, national parks.*—A. D. L. Robinson, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 4 *Hunters Island and English River District. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.*—T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 5 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta. Climate, prospects, hunting, fishing and yachting.*—C. Plowden, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

✠**Canada Part 6** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.*—Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada.

✠**Canada Part 7** *Southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power.*—Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 8 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Lumbering, hunting, fishing and trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography, farming and homesteading.*—Fred L. Bowden, 54 Mason Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

Canada Part 9 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic. General questions on this territory, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere. Also Royal Canadian Mounted Police.*—Patrick Lee, Tudor Hall, Elmhurst, Long Island.

Newfoundland *Hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography; general information.*—C. T. James, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Alaska *Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.*—Theodore S. Solomons, 5647 Lexington Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Baffinland and Greenland *Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo.)*—Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Western U. S. Part 1 *Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.*—E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.*—H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colo. and Wyo. Agriculture, stock-raising, mining, game, fur-hunting, fishing, camping, outdoor life in general.*—Frank Earnest, Sugar Loaf, Colo.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.*—Fred W. Egleston, Bozeman, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.*—R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially early history of Missouri Valley.*—Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Mo. and Ark. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 4 *Mississippi River. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (See section* 66.)—Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa.

Middle Western U. S. Part 5 *Great Lakes. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.*—H. C. Gardner, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional) conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.*—Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers. (Editor to be appointed.)*

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville. (Editor to be appointed.)*

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Southern Appalachians. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic sea, board. Hunting fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.*—Hapsburg Liebe, care *Adventure.*

Eastern U. S. Part 6 *Maine. For all territory* west *of the Penobscot river. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.*—Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Eastern Maine. For all territory* east *of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.*—H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 8 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions, history.*—Howard R. Voight, 108 Hobart St., New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 9 *Maryland. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.*—Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories.*—Edgar S. Perkins, 5742 Stony Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating George W. Sutton, 6 East 45th St., New York City.

Motor Camping John D. Long, 1133 Broadway, New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operators, operating cost, legislative restrictions, public safety.*—Edmund B. Neil.

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1880. *Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. (Editor to be appointed.)*

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right foos and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.*—Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock promotion.*—Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign Lieut. Glenn R. Townsend, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning Naval and maritime affairs.*—Lieut. Francis Greene, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

State Police Francis H. Bent, Jr., care *Adventure.*

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—Thomas H. Dameron, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—Paul L. Anderson, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—Arthur Woodward, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City.

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.*—Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. and Central Park West, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.*—Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J.

Stamps H. A. Davis, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals Howland Wood, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

SPORTS

Track Jackson Scholz, 73 Farmington Ave., Long Meadow, Mass.

Tennis *Results, style of play, history, etc. Questions as to rules will not be answered.*—Fred Hawthorne, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune,* New York City.

Basketball Joe F. Carr, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

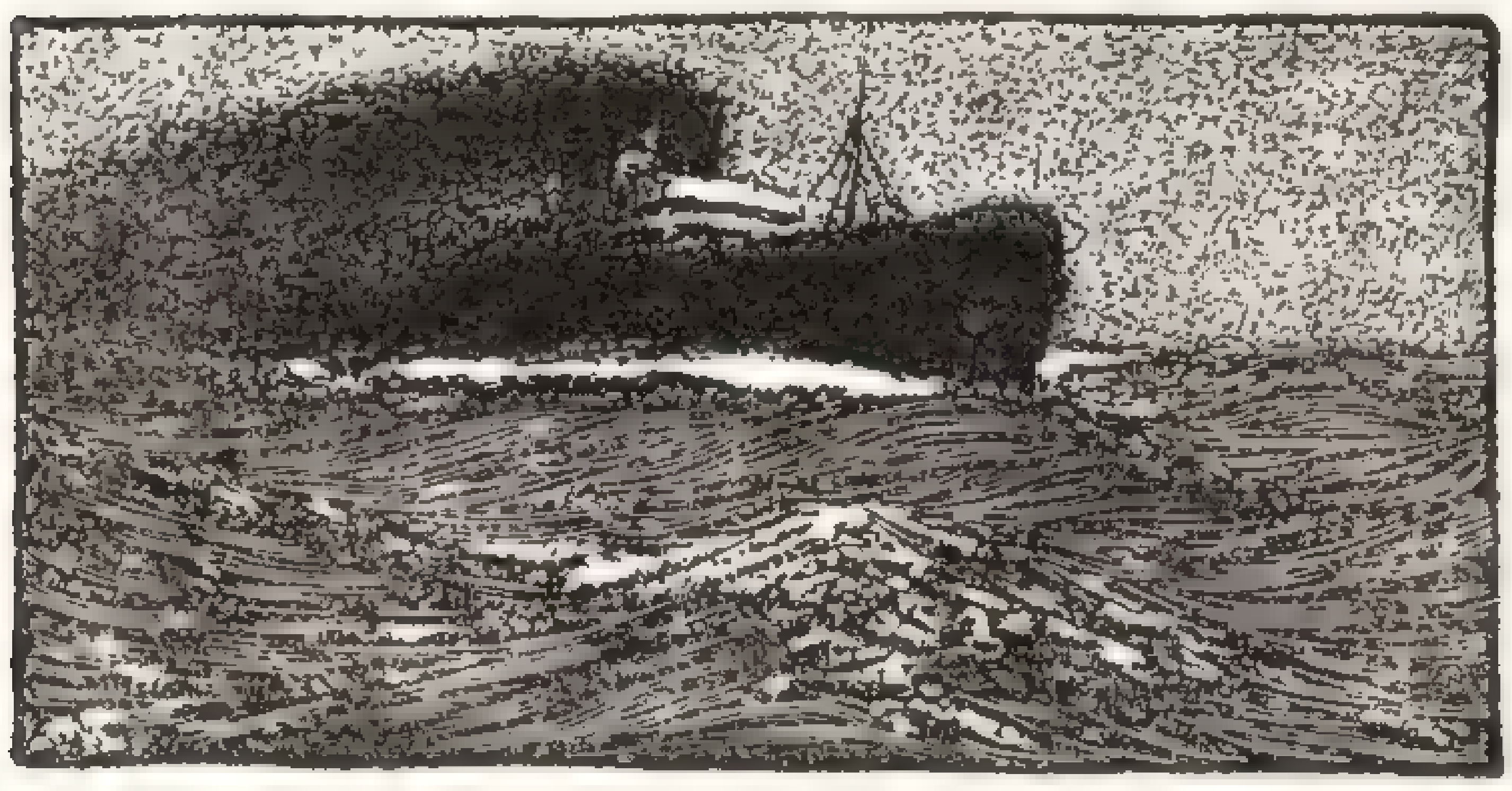
Bicycling Arthur J. LeaMond, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Skating Frank Schreiber, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. Price, 160 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World



ONE man dashes off to Europe for a few months' trip and does what thousands have done before him. He touches the capitals of each large country, eats at restaurants where other Americans eat, "sees a few shows," comments on the traffic system, and is back. A second plans his trip almost lovingly. He does not try to cover more than he can comfortably in the time he takes. He reads and plans and asks questions.

The latter jaunts leisurely through France and spends days in discovering off-the-track villages where quiet lives; and apple-cheeked women in starched lace caps and flying ribbons still pray at wayside shrines or beat their family wash with wooden paddles in the common streams. He rests at night in a whitewashed, straw-thatched cottage in the Carpathians and watches the hot-tempered Hungarian cattle turn off at their home gates as they are driven through the street by the town herdsman, while children and loiterers scamper for cover. He sails down the Danube to Roumania, past the old Turkish Island of Ada Kaleh, once the stronghold of the Mohammedan and the gate to Western Europe from the Balkans.

The off-the-trail traveler drifts to a new little republic on the Baltic. Here the Letts, under Russian domination, were invaded by Germans; after the Armistice, having been declared independent, they were in turn overrun by the Russian Bolshevik forces. With the help of the Germans Latvia drove out the Bolsheviks, and a few months later had to turn about and drive out the Germans.

Here, and all over the continent, is history in the making, a new Europe growing out of the soil rich with centuries of tradition, friendships and hatreds. It is this Europe that the real traveler wants to know and understand. Whether he vists the great cities or the out-of-the-way nooks he wants to get the "feel" of the places, to learn as much as he can about the lives and thoughts of the people who live there.

Many of the travelers who do the Number One sort of tour would like to do the second thing if they knew how. It is for them—for the ones who know how and the ones who want to know how—that Adventure's Travel Association is established. With a central office at *Adventure* headquarters in New York, and local stations all over the world, members of the Association can be helped along in friendly fashion from one spot to another. We plan to place at our readers' disposal the services of our own Stations now being established and to act as a clearing house for every travel factor already in existence—government bureaus, steamship lines, railroads, touring clubs, and similar organizations. Arrangements are being completed to establish thousands of stations in Europe, the United States and all over the world.

As for the more adventurous type of traveler whose interest lies in those regions least known to man, well, they're pretty well taken care of already by our "Ask Adventure" experts, but Adventure's Travel Association is going to build further and very special machinery to meet their particular needs. More on this later.

An interesting feature of the Association is the connection we have made with the Fashion Department of The Butterick Publishing Company. Fashions in *Adventure?* Perhaps it does sound incongruous but you won't think so when you plan a trip to Brazil in March or Norway in April. What clothes will you take—light, heavy, linen or silks? There are plenty of extremely practical questions on the clothes problem that make travel more comfortable if they are satisfactorily settled.

We have also been assured the cooperation of the Chambers of Commerce of other countries. At the present writing the representatives of every foreign government are being interviewed and are giving us their enthusiastic support. Representatives of countries as widely separated as the following for instance have cooperated with us in securing information, establishing stations, and have placed us in touch with sources of information in their countries: French, German, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Roumanian, Austrian, Finnish, Latvian, Spanish, Swiss, Peruvian, Canadian, Mexican, Siamese. Many more are being interviewed every day so that shortly we shall have collected complete data from authoritative sources on every country.

When we first planned Adventure's Travel Association it looked big and promising. Practical developments have made it look so much bigger and more promising that it's difficult to hold ourselves down until we can prove our enthusiasm justified by laying before you the completed structure. It's not only going to be a boon to travelers and an asset for our magazine but, as the Vice-Consul of one European nation remarked, it "can do more to foster international friendship and understanding than any other one factor or political organization."

Many of you, through your suggestions, have already helped bring matters to the present satisfactory stage and given us a feeling of working with you instead of just for you. Keep it up!

A News Bulletin *of Outdoor Equipment and Commodities*

STRAIGHT GOODS

TESTED BY OUR EXPERTS

A TESTING laboratory that covers several thousand miles is new in the publishing field, or in any field. *Adventure* has one, however, that extends from Alaska to Massachusetts. The individual factors of the laboratory have been there a long time; it is only recently that they have been organized into an official department. In the Questions and Answers section of the Ask Adventure we have gathered over a period of years a group of experts on almost a hundred separate subjects. We have men who are recognized authorities on sports and outdoor activities—authorities because they have spent a large part of their lives hunting, fishing, raising horses or whatever their particular fields may be; so that the verdict of an A. A. man is about the soundest verdict you can get.

These experts have always answered the questions of *Adventure* readers concerning suitable equipment for various activities and in the Questions and Answers section will continue to do so. In addition to their function in that department they have become part of the new Straight Goods Department in which outdoor commodities of all sorts are tried out and discussed. Several experts are testing products and will publish impartial reports in this department, telling how they tested the equipment, what features were most valuable, how to use and care for the article for the best service.

In this department, as well as in all other Ask Adventure divisions, we are anxious to get our readers' suggestions. Your requests for information will guide us in selecting the products to be tested.

Old SONGS that Men have Sung

Conducted by R. W. GORDON

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them. Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and if all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelope and sufficient reply postage (not attached). Write to Mr. R. W. Gordon direct (*not* to the magazine), care of Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

HERE is long broadside text from New Brunswick. Like all broadsides it has a minimum of folk traits and a maximum of author. It is, however, worthy of preservation. Does any one know its history?

Howard Curry

(Communicated by Mr. George Hirdt, who obtained it from Mr. Herbert Eddy of Gloucester County, N. B.)

My name is Howard Curry;
At Grandfall I was born,
In a pleasant little cottage
On the banks of the St. John,
Where the small birds chant their notes so true
And the tumbling waters roar;
The ivy vines were thickly twined
Round our cottage on the shore.

We lived there quite contented
Till the year of 'eighty-four;
It's then I left my happy home
For the Bay of Fundy shore.
My aged parents, they being poor,
Could not maintain us all;
I had to leave my happy home,
For our little farm was small.

The day I left my happy home
They took me by the hand,
Saying, "Don't forget your parents dear
When in some foreign land.
And don't forget old proverb,
The one that is true of old,
"All that sparkles is not gems,
All glitters is not gold."

My mother led me to a seat
Beneath the willow tree,
With quivering lips bade me sit down,
She wished to speak to me.
"You see on yonder hillside
The grass is growing green;
The daisies and the violets
And the wildrose may be seen.

"Those flowers are magnificent,
Attractive to the eye,
But still remember that the snake
Beneath the colors lies.
And when you are in some foreign land
I'll have you to beware—
Each pleasure has its poison too
And every sweet its snare.

"Shun bad company, my boy,
And from strong drink refrain;
Don't patronize those gambling hells,
Look on them with disdain!"
I rose up from my resting seat,
For the dewdrops bright and fair
Had kissed the rose a fond adieu—
I watched them disappear.

It's one by one they fade away
Beneath the sun's bright ray;
The time has come when I must go,
I can no longer stay.
My sisters and my brothers
In a group stood by the door,
I waved my hand and left them stand
In that cottage by the shore.

Four years ago a letter came
Which filled me with alarm,
Saying, "Son, your mother is dying
And her heart for you does yearn.
She constantly repeats your name
'Has my wand'ring son returned?' "

I hastened home, but all too late!
I saw that all was o'er.
The curtains they were closely drawn,
Black crêpe hung on the door.
And now she sleeps that long, long sleep
Beneath the churchyard sod;
Four dreary years have passed and gone
Since her spirit went to God.

Since then I've traveled in the East,
And in the South also;
I've traveled in those Western lands
Where the lofty redwoods grow.
My mother's warning did not heed,
And like a silly fly
Got tangled in the silver web,
And now am doomed to die.

Today I am lying in a room
In a town of Rumford Falls,
My feverish eyes are wandering
Upon its whitewashed walls.
The agony I undergo
I can not long endure,
My limbs are weak and painful,
I am dying slow but sure.

I'll cut the tender thread of life
I'll bid this world adieu,
I'll tie this cord unto the hinge

Upon my chamber door.
There is room enough for me to hang
Between it and the floor,
And when I am dead this world
Will roll on just the same as e'er.

The birds will sing with fond a play
In shady woodlands fair,
The grass will grow on just as green,
The flowers will bloom as fair.
What signifies a mortal man
That is moldering in the clay?

So farewell brothers and sisters,
To home and friends adieu!
And you, the girl that I adore,
May God watch over you!
No more we'll roam in grove so green
To hear the thrushes sing,
She is purer than the lilies fair
That bloomed all in the spring.

Doc. Darkens came at twelve o'clock
To see his charge once more;
He found his body hanging
On a hinge upon the door.
He took his knife and cut him down,
Caused many a face grow pale,
And filled many a heart with wonder
When they heard that mournful tale.

And now his remains lie moldering
By his dear mother's side,
She did not live to know, poor thing,
The cruel death he died!
For it's liquor and bad women
They both to him had gave
A blighted life, disgrace and shame
And now a dark, dishonored grave.

And now, all you young men, a warning take
By this sad tale of wo,
And shun bad company or it
Will prove your overthrow!

WONDER if any reader can tell me more about the following rather curious bit that comes from Mr. A. F. Barnett. The verses, he says, are to be spoken and the chorus sung. Who knows it?

Rye Straw

(Sent in by Mr. A. F. Barnett, Australia)

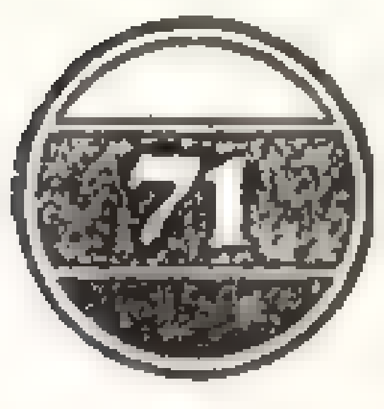
Somebody stole my old black dog,
I wish they would fetch him back!
He run the big hogs over the fence,
And the little ones through the crack.

Rye straw, rye straw,
Rye straw, rye straw.

Somebody stole my old white hen
I wish they would leave her be!
She lays two eggs of weekly days,
And Sundays she lays three.

Rye straw, rye straw,
Rye straw, rye straw.

ADDRESS all letters—R. W. Gordon, Care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.



Camp-Fire Buttons—To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Forwarding Mail—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Books You Can Believe—Verdicts of our experts on the reliability of non-fiction books appear in alternate issues.

Lost Trails—This department for finding missing friends and relatives is printed only in alternate issues.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: *Adventure* from 1919 to 1925, incomplete, totalling 112 issues, also November, 1918. What am I offered for the lot?—Address, B. DORAN, 3377 So. 17th Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

WILL SELL or EXCHANGE: Issues from 1920 to 1926, at 7c. each, plus postage. File incomplete, so will exchange.—Address, GEORGE J. CHAMPION, 1761 E. 39th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

WILL SELL: *Adventure* complete for 1922. Thirty-six copies, 10c each plus postage.—Address, J. PECARO, 505 W. 6th Street, St. Charles, Illinois.

Identification Cards—Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Camp-Fire Stations—Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to J. CASSIDY.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *December 23d*

Two *Complete Novelettes:*

The Pennsylvania Line

By Wilkinson O'Connell

Anthony Wayne was leading the men—"Mad Anthony" whom they adored, who shared hardship and pleasure alike with them. His word was law to them until he encountered the rebellious patriot, *Loyd Fallen.*

Mandarin Honor

By Charles Gilson

Possession is the right of the strongest along the dark rivers of China, where *Mark Hebden*, the white wanderer, and the mandarin *Ying Taotai* struggled with all of their strength and craft for the fair young *Jen-tc.*

The Goldbricker

By Leonard H. Nason

True enough, the German batteries were ploughing the field to a hash. But beyond that field were the French, and *Shorty* craved French cheese for his bread.

The Fallacy of "Faro"

By Walter J. Coburn

When a man admits something against himself he's usually telling the truth, but in *Faro's* case this didn't hold, as the world found out after *Jack Manton* rode into town.

And—*Other Good Stories*

Into the treasure-cave, Part Five of Treasure, by Gordon Young; *Part five of* The Way of Sinners, by F. R. Buckley, *in which* Francesco *finds wisdom;* Two Old Men, *friendship and a blizzard,* by Alan Le May; Deliverance, *when the world came to the mountain women,* by Fiswoode Tarleton; Airways, Rutter *tries his hand at a new game*, by A. A. Caffrey.

Adventure is out on the 8th and 23d of each month

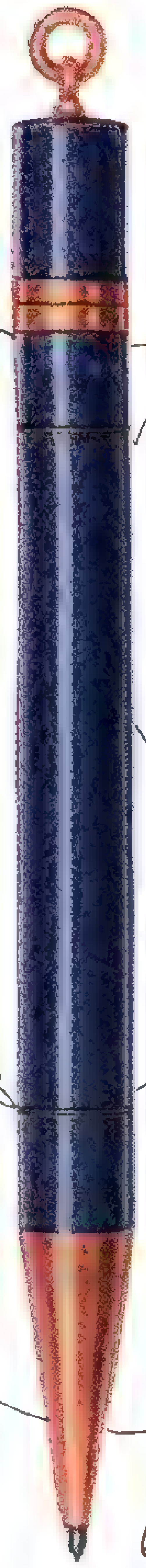
Conklin ENDURA

Unconditionally & Perpetually Guaranteed

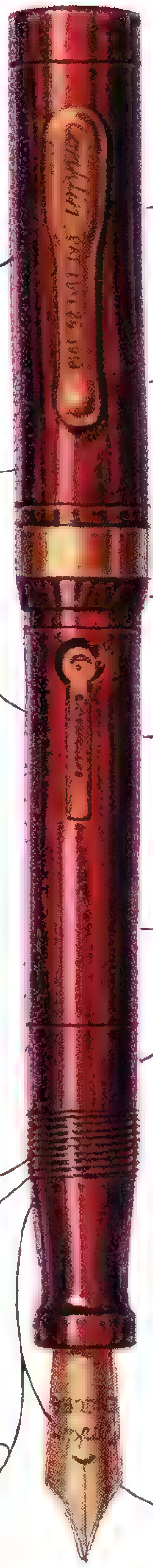
Give Lasting Beauty

Nothing else that you can select for Yuletide giving will confer such lasting benefits upon the fortunate recipient as a Conklin Endura, for no matter how or when any Conklin Endura fountain pen is broken or its usefulness impaired, it will be repaired or replaced free whenever all the broken parts are sent to us. For over three years this *unconditional* and *perpetual* guarantee of free service has protected the owner of a Conklin Endura pen, and experience has proved that the quality and workmanship in this super-pen of all time is indeed such as to justify even such an unlimited guarantee. There are Endura Pencils to match all Endura Pens. Try them at leading pen counters.

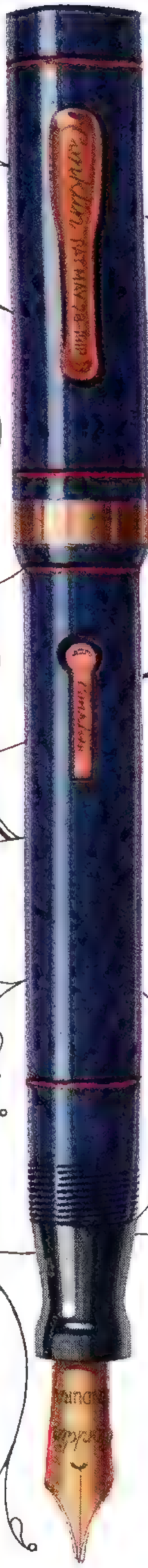
THE CONKLIN PEN MANUFACTURING
COMPANY :: *Toledo, Ohio*
BOSTON CHICAGO SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON BARCELONA



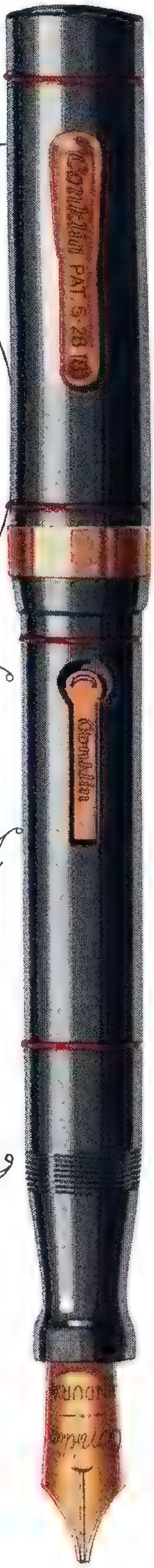
Sapphire Blue,
$3.50
Long Model with
Clip, $4.00



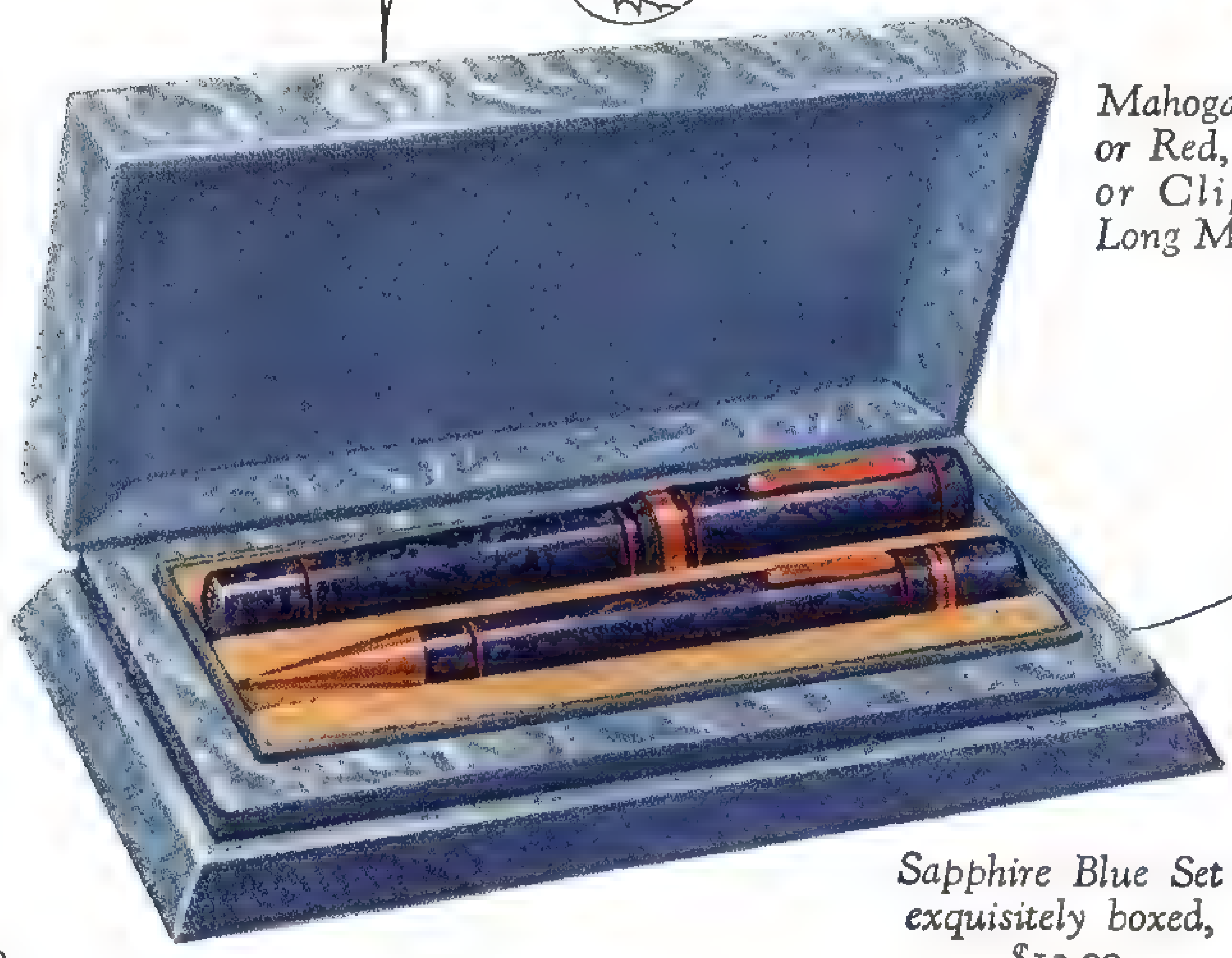
Mahogany, Black
or Red, with Ring
or Clip, $5.00.
Long Model, $7.00



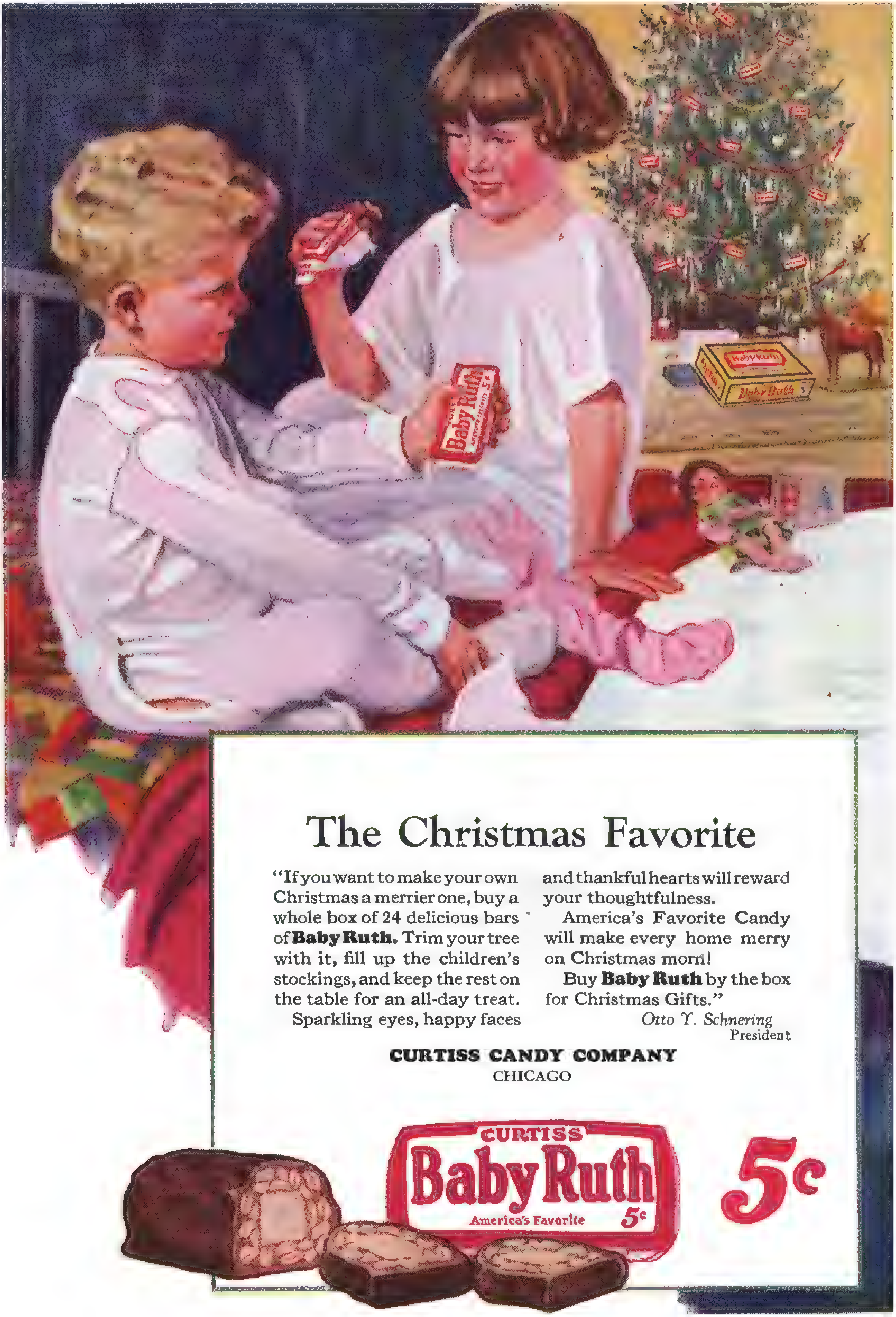
Sapphire Blue,
$8.00
Short Model with
Ring or Clip, $6.00



Black, Mahogany,
or Red, $7.00
Short Model with
Ring or Clip, $5.00



Sapphire Blue Set
exquisitely boxed,
$12.00



Baby Ruth 5¢
Baby Ruth
CURTISS
Baby Ruth
America's Favorite
5¢
5¢

The Christmas Favorite

"If you want to make your own Christmas a merrier one, buy a whole box of 24 delicious bars of **Baby Ruth.** Trim your tree with it, fill up the children's stockings, and keep the rest on the table for an all-day treat.

Sparkling eyes, happy faces and thankful hearts will reward your thoughtfulness.

America's Favorite Candy will make every home merry on Christmas morn!

Buy **Baby Ruth** by the box for Christmas Gifts."

Otto Y. Schnering
President

CURTISS CANDY COMPANY
CHICAGO

"His Tail Between His Legs"

What most men would see if they could see themselves

MOST men are being whipped every day in the battle of life. Many have already reached the stage where they have **THEIR TAILS BETWEEN THEIR LEGS.**

They are afraid of everything and everybody. They live in a constant fear of being deprived of the pitiful existence they are leading Vaguely they hope for **SOMETHING TO TURN UP** that will make them unafraid, courageous, independent.

While they hope vainly, they drift along, with no definite purpose, no definite plan, nothing ahead of them but old age. The scourgings of life do not help such men. In fact, the more lashes they receive at the hands of fate, the more **COWED** they become.

What becomes of these men? They are the wage slaves. They are the "little-business" slaves, the millions of clerks, storekeepers, bookkeepers, laborers, assistants, secretaries, salesmen. They are the millions who work and sweat and—**MAKE OTHERS RICH AND HAPPY!**

The pity of it is, nothing can **SHAKE THEM** out of their complacency. Nothing can stir them out of the mental rut into which they have sunk.

Their wives, too, quickly lose ambition and become slaves—slaves to their kitchens, slaves to their children, slaves to their husbands—slaves to their homes. And with such examples before them, what hope is there for their children **BUT TO GROW UP INTO SLAVERY.**

Some men, however, after years of cringing, turn on life. They **CHALLENGE** the whipper. They discover, perhaps to their own surprise, that it isn't so difficult as they imagined, **TO SET A HIGH GOAL**—and reach it! Only a few try—it is true—but that makes it easier for those who **DO** try.

The rest quit. They show a yellow streak as broad as their backs. They are through—and in their hearts they know it. Not that they are beyond help, but that they have acknowledged defeat, laid down their arms, stopped using their heads, and have simply said to life, "Now do with me as you will."

What about **YOU**? Are you ready to admit that you are through? Are you content to sit back and wait for something to turn up? Have you shown a yellow streak in **YOUR** Battle of Life? Are you satisfied to keep your wife and children—and yourself—enslaved? **ARE YOU AFRAID OF LIFE?**

Success is a simple thing to acquire when you know its formula. The first ingredient is a grain of **COURAGE**. The second is a dash of **AMBITION**. The third is an ounce of **MENTAL EFFORT**. Mix the whole with your God-given faculties and no power on earth can keep you from your desires, be they what they may.

Most people actually use about **ONE-TENTH** of their brain capacity. It is as if they were deliberately trying to remain twelve years old mentally. They do not profit by the experience they have gained, nor by the experience of others.

You can develop these God-given faculties by yourself—without outside help; or you can do as **FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND** other people have done—study Pelmanism.

Pelmanism is the science of applied psychology, which has swept the world with the force of a religion. It is a fact that more than 550,000 people have become Pelmanists—all over the civilized world—and Pelmanism has awakened powers in them they did not **DREAM** they possessed.

Famous people all over the world advocate Pelmanism, men and women such as these:

T. P. O'Connor, "Father of the House of Commons."
The late Sir H. Rider-Haggard, Famous novelist.
Frank P. Walsh, Former Chairman of National War Labor Board.
Jerome K. Jerome, Novelist.

General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, Founder of the Boy Scout Movement.
Judge Ben B. Lindsey, Founder of the Juvenile Court, Denver.
Sir Harry Lauder, Comedian.
W. L. George, Author.
Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice, Director of Military Operations, Imperial General Staff.
Admiral Lord Beresford, G. C. B., G. C. V. O.
Baroness Orczy, Author.
Prince Charles of Sweden.

—and others, of equal prominence, too numerous to mention here.

A remarkable book called "Scientific Mind-Training," has been written about Pelmanism. **IT CAN BE OBTAINED FREE.** Yet thousands of people who read this announcement and who **NEED** this book will not send for it. "It's no use," they will say. "It will do me no good," they will tell themselves. "It's all tommyrot," others will say.

But if they use their **HEADS** they will realize that people cannot be **HELPED** by tommyrot and that there **MUST** be something in Pelmanism, when it has such a record behind it, and when it is endorsed by the kind of people listed above.

If you are made of the stuff that isn't content to remain a slave—if you have taken your last whipping from life,—if you have a spark of **INDEPENDENCE** left in your soul, write for this free book. It tells you what Pelmanism is, **WHAT IT HAS DONE FOR OTHERS**, and what it can do for you.

The first principle of **YOUR** success is to do something radical in your life. You cannot make just an ordinary move, for you will soon again sink into the mire of discouragement. Let Pelmanism help you **FIND YOURSELF**. Mail the coupon below now—now while your resolve to **DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF** is strong.

THE PELMAN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

Approved as a correspondence school under the laws of the State of New York.

19 West 44th Street Suite 159C New York City

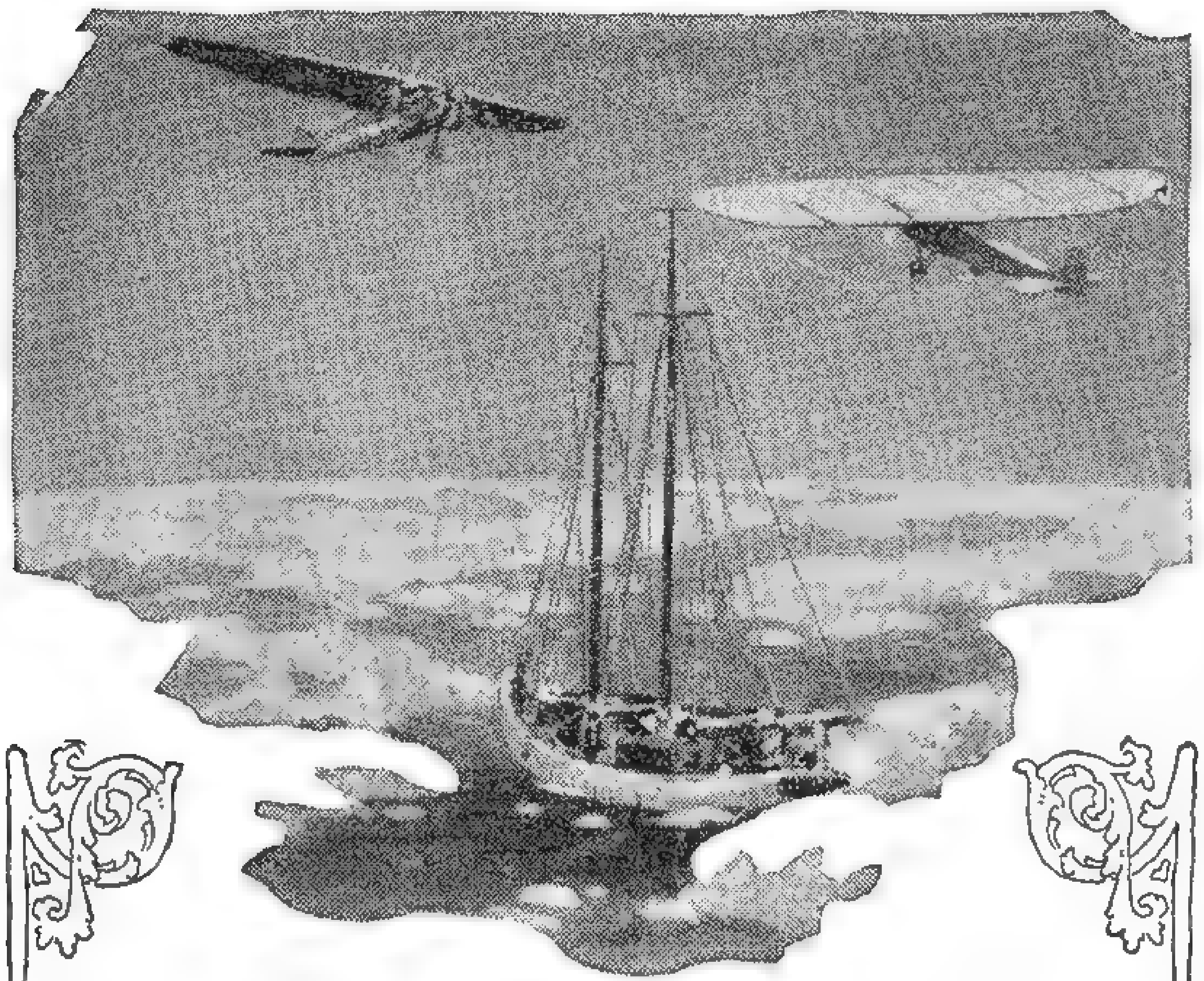
The Pelman Institute of America,
19 West 44th Street, Suite 159C,
New York City.

I want you to show me what Pelmanism has actually done for over 550,000 people. Please send me your free book, "Scientific Mind Training." This places me under no obligation whatever.

Name ____________________

Address ____________________

City ____________________ State ____________________



The Crowning Adventure *of* Burgess Radio Batteries

They flew over the North Pole with Byrd

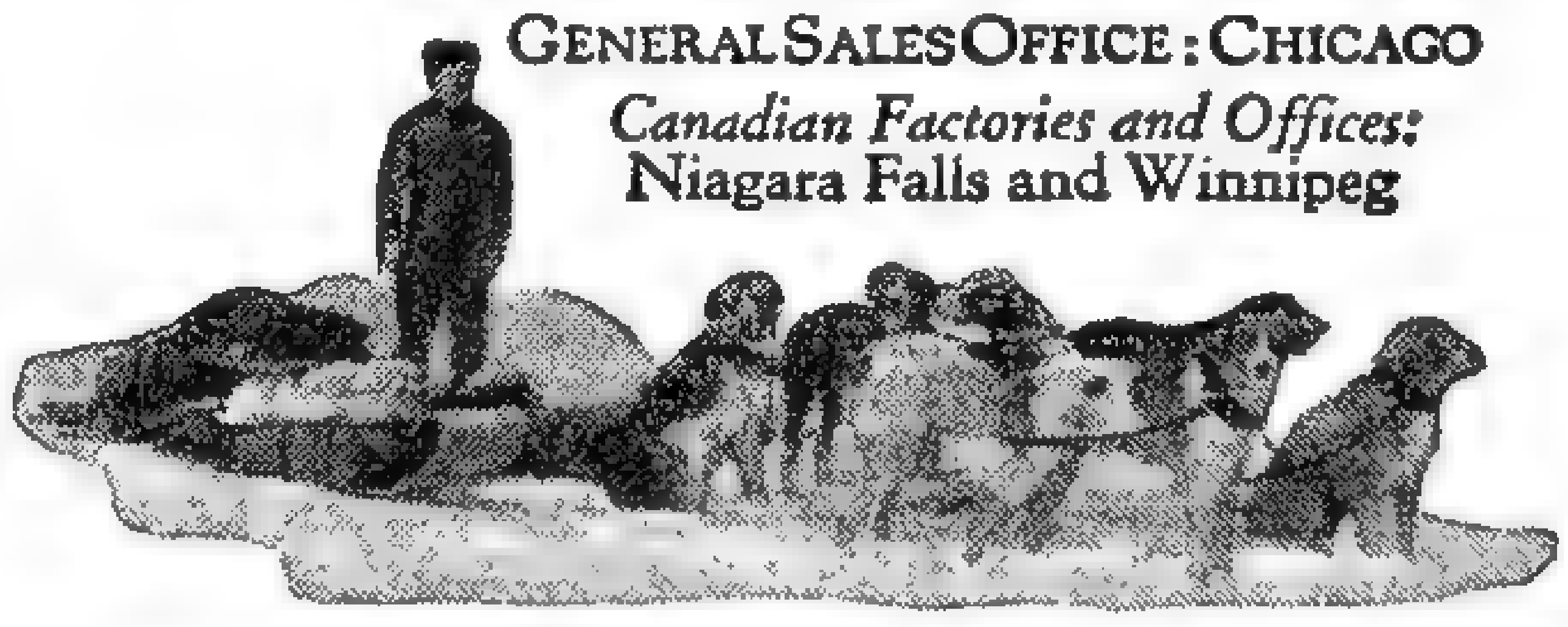
ON May 9, 1926, history was made . . . American history . . . World history . . . undying history.

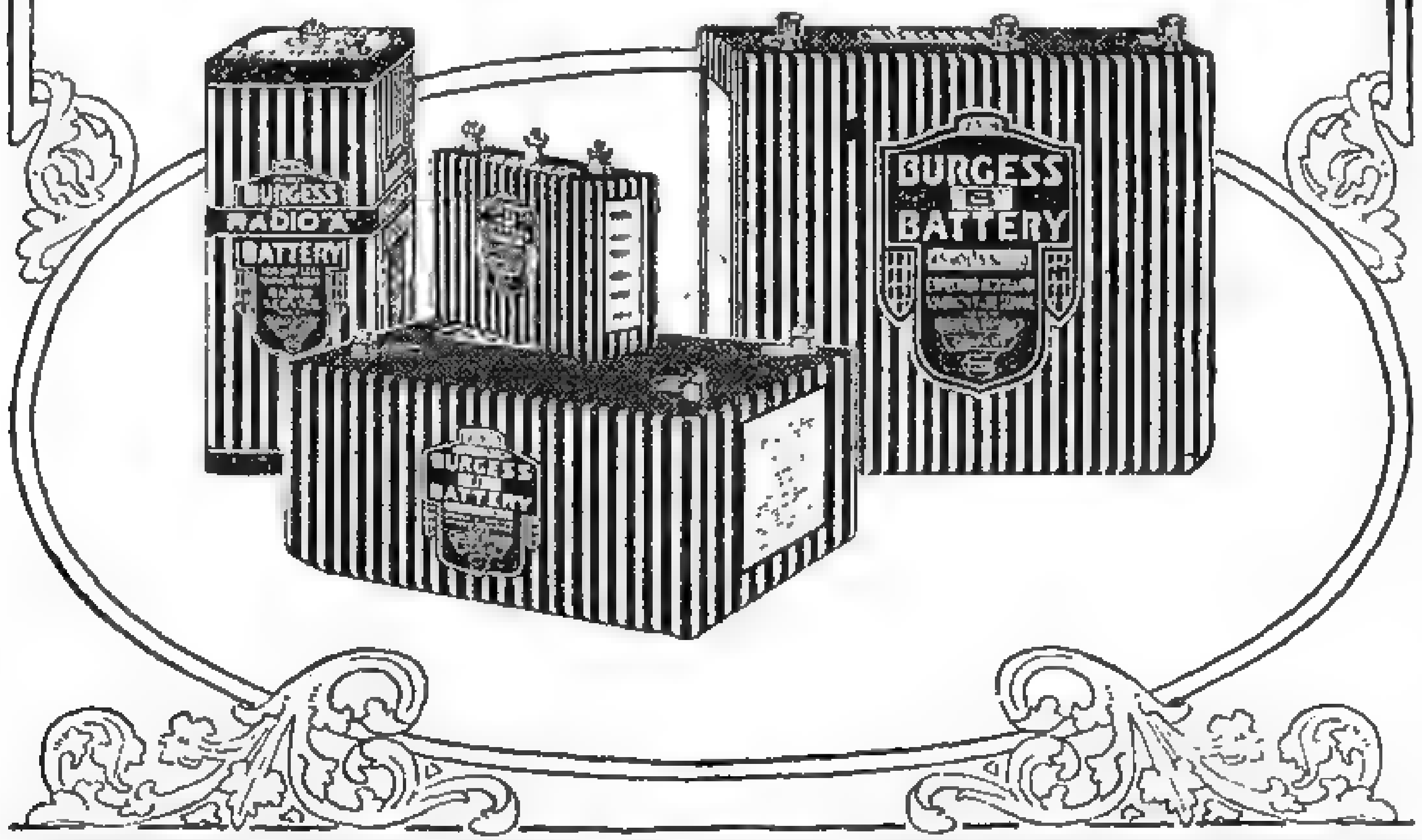
Lieut. Commander Byrd in his fearless 1500-mile flight across the top of the world, adds another thrilling triumph to the long, proud list of American achievements.

Radio went along, for radio has become vital to the lives and success of explorers and adventurers. Burgess Batteries went along, sharing the fate—sharing the hardships and the glory of Commander Byrd, the Detroit Arctic Expedition, and Capt. Donald MacMillan.

It is eminently significant that in these glorious triumphs of American courage and American equipment where the test of men and their tools was the test of the survival of the fittest, that the standard products of the Burgess Battery Company were selected, used and "carried on" under extreme and unprecedented conditions.

BURGESS BATTERY COMPANY
GENERAL SALES OFFICE: CHICAGO
Canadian Factories and Offices:
Niagara Falls and Winnipeg

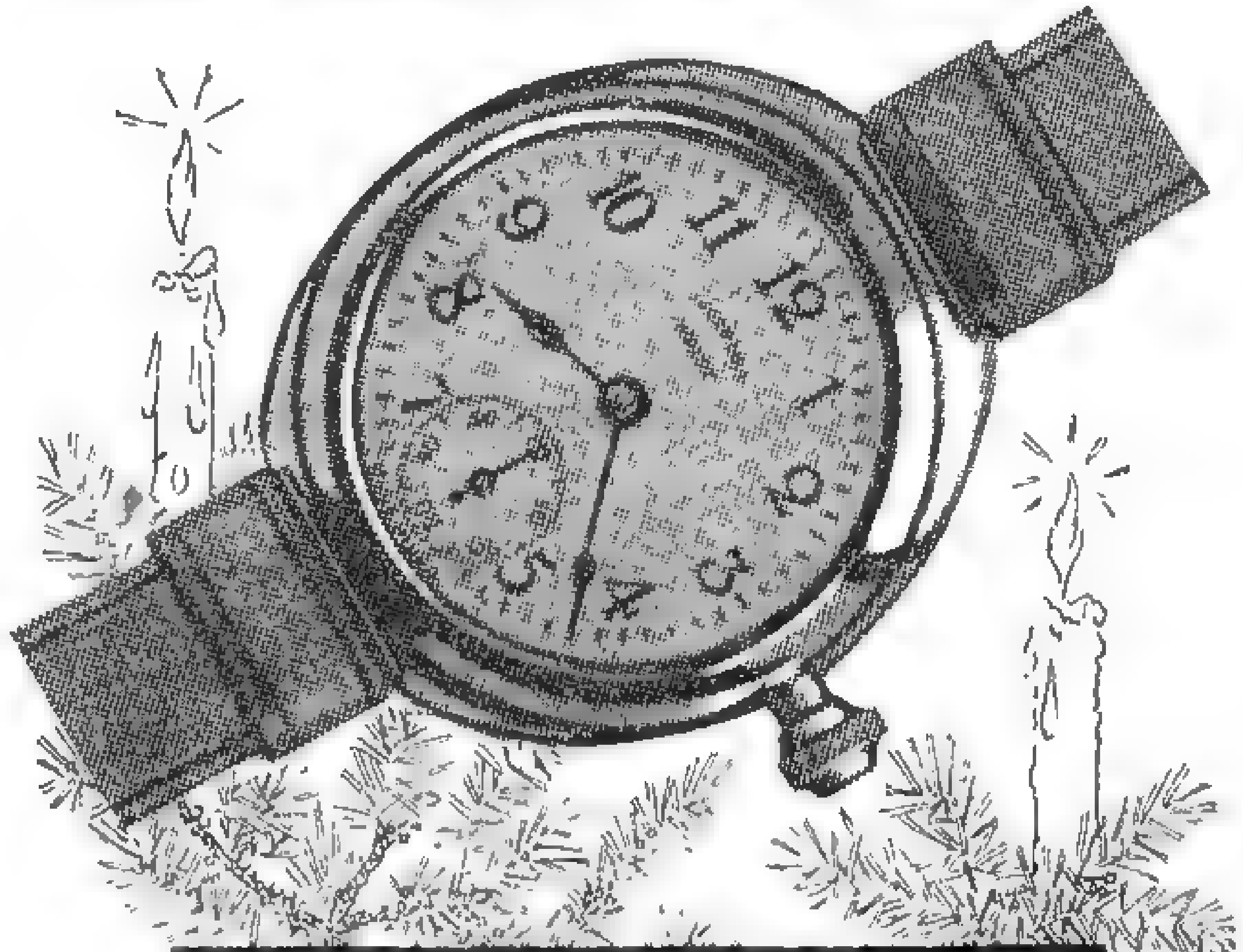




BURGESS RADIO BATTERIES

INGERSOLL Wrist Watch

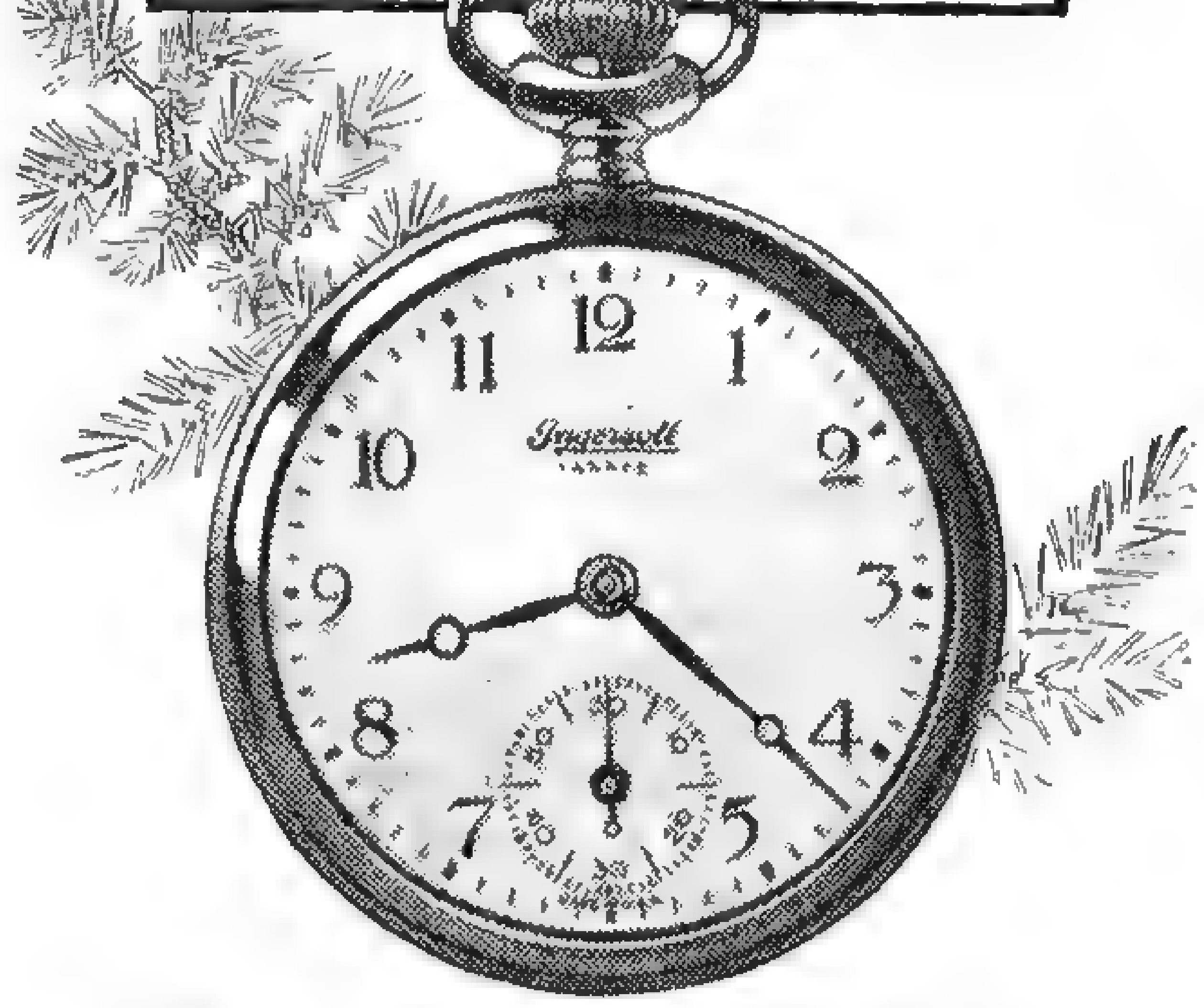
Recently reduced to . . $3.50
New model this year. Tonneau-shape; silvered metal dial. Wrist Radiolite, tells time in the dark, $4.00



For Christmas an Ingersoll

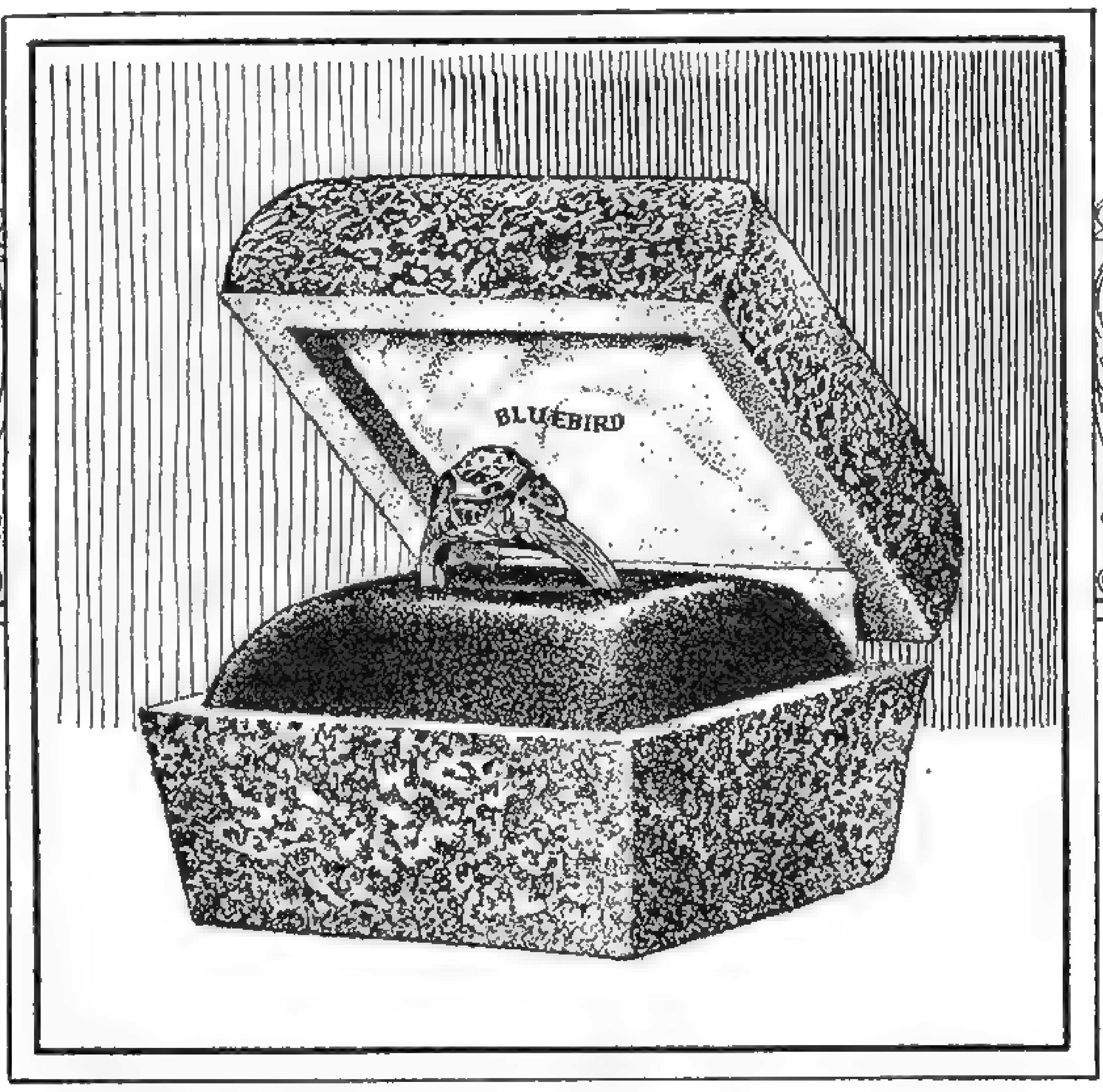
When you give an Ingersoll watch you make a gift that is appreciated all out of proportion to its cost. For there's no gift like a watch, nothing used so much, consulted so often, carried so long. And Ingersoll Watches, made for over 30 years, have a reputation for dependability and enduring service that is worldwide and thoroughly deserved.

INGERSOLL WATCH CO., Inc.
New York Chicago San Francisco



The New YANKEE

Recently reduced to $1.50
More closely cased, antique bow and crown, new dial and other new features of grace and beauty. Sturdy and dependable.



Bluebird
GENUINE DIAMOND RINGS

THE sentiment that diamonds most often express is worthy of the best, and to place their intrinsic value beyond question is to make the more precious the sentiment for which they stand.

The "Bluebird" Diamond guarantee establishes the standard of superior quality, because it is, first of all, the *word of honor* of a reputable maker, supported by the word of your own retail jeweler; who holds a "Bluebird" franchise because he is worthy of confidence.

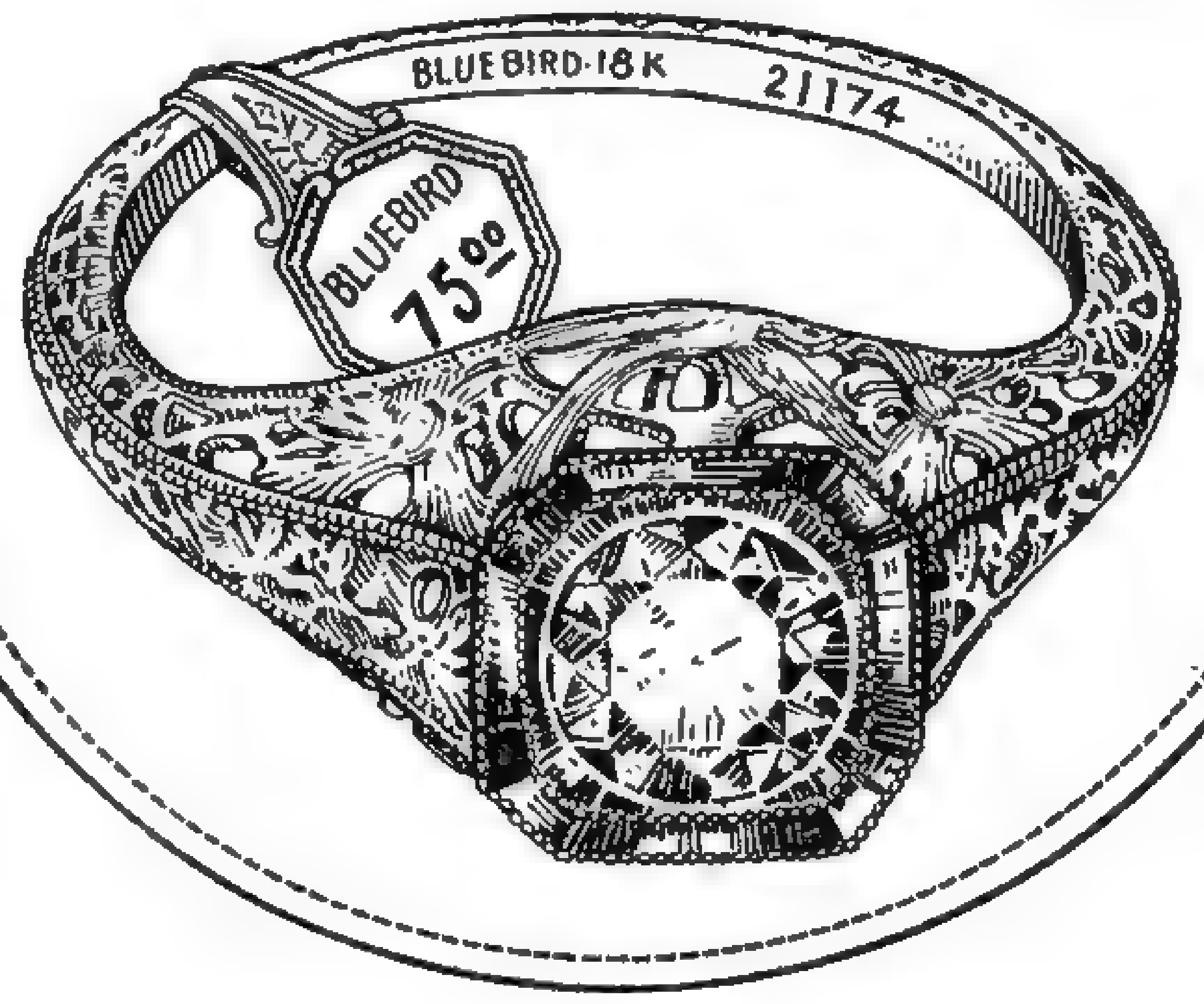
"Bluebird" Diamond Rings are sold only by retail jewelers at nationally advertised prices. There's a price for every purse, from $50.00 to $5000.00—but there's only one standard of quality.

Ask your own jeweler about "Bluebird" Diamond Rings. If he cannot show you "Bluebirds"—ask us about them.

The BLUEBIRD DIAMOND SYNDICATE, INC.
31 North State Street — Chicago

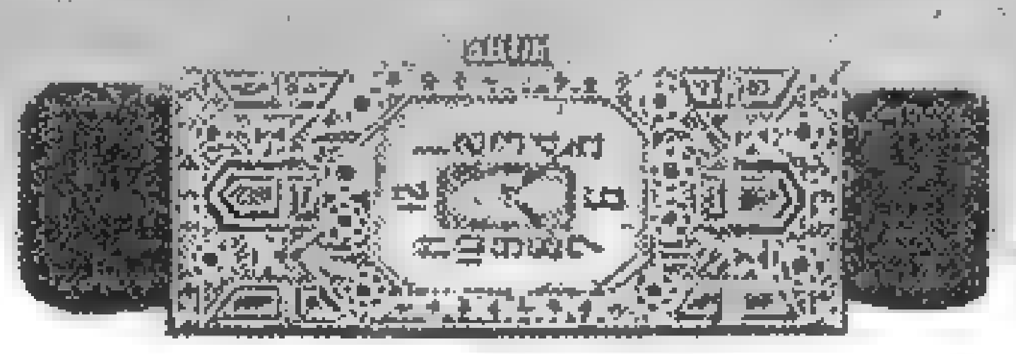
BLUEBIRD
75⁰⁰

A metal price tag is affixed by us—your assurance of maximum value.

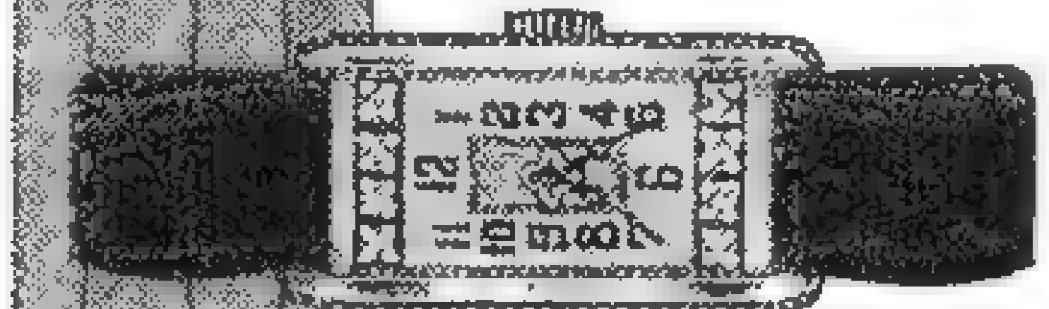


Note the serial number. It's recorded by the jeweler and us—absolute identification.

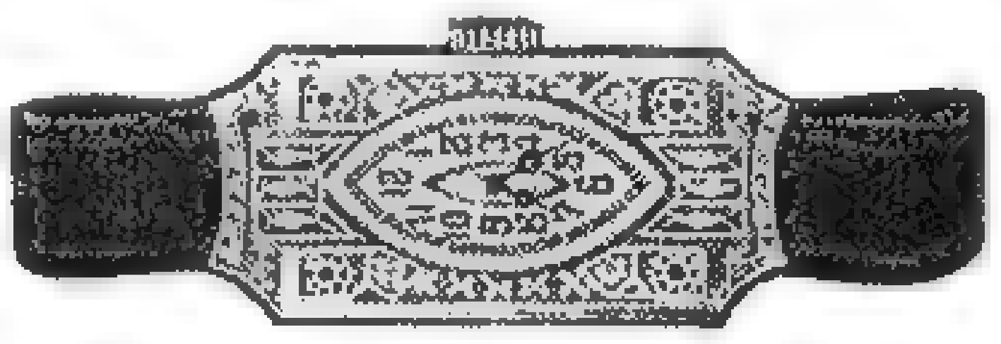
BLUEBIRD
150⁰⁰



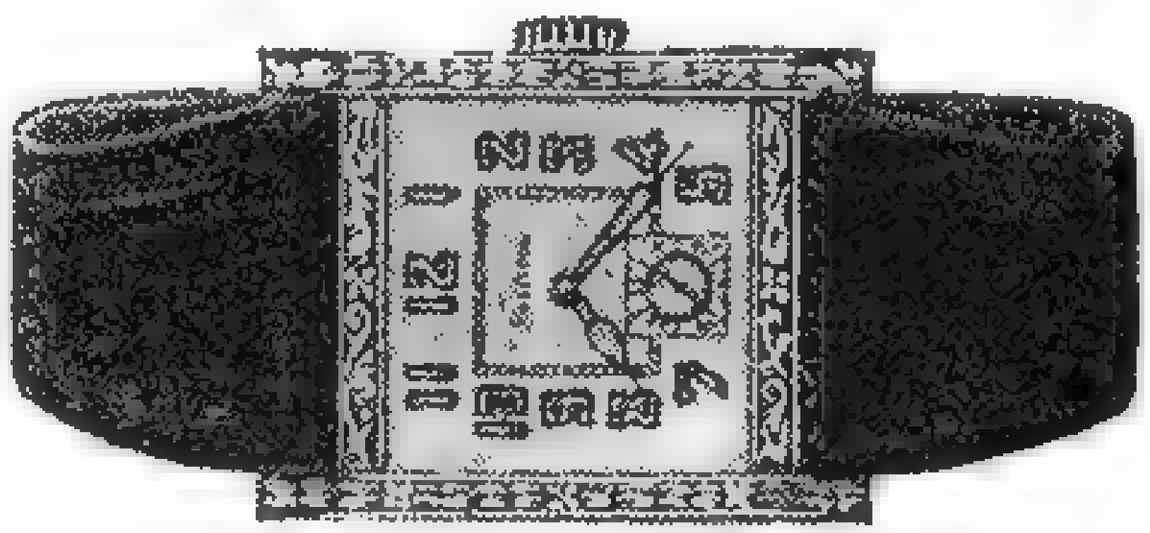
No. 96687 Gem-set Helbros. $300.
17 jewels, 18 k. white gold, 3-piece case
12 diamonds, 12 synthetic emeralds set in platinum



No. 95283 Helbros "Superb." $50.
15 jewels, 14 k. solid white gold, 3-piece case



No. 95656 Gem-set Helbros. $133.
15 jewels, 18 k. solid white gold, 3-piece case
4 diamonds, 6 French-cut synthetic sapphires



No. 49282 Helbros for men. $38.
15 jewels. 14 k. green gold-filled, 3-piece case

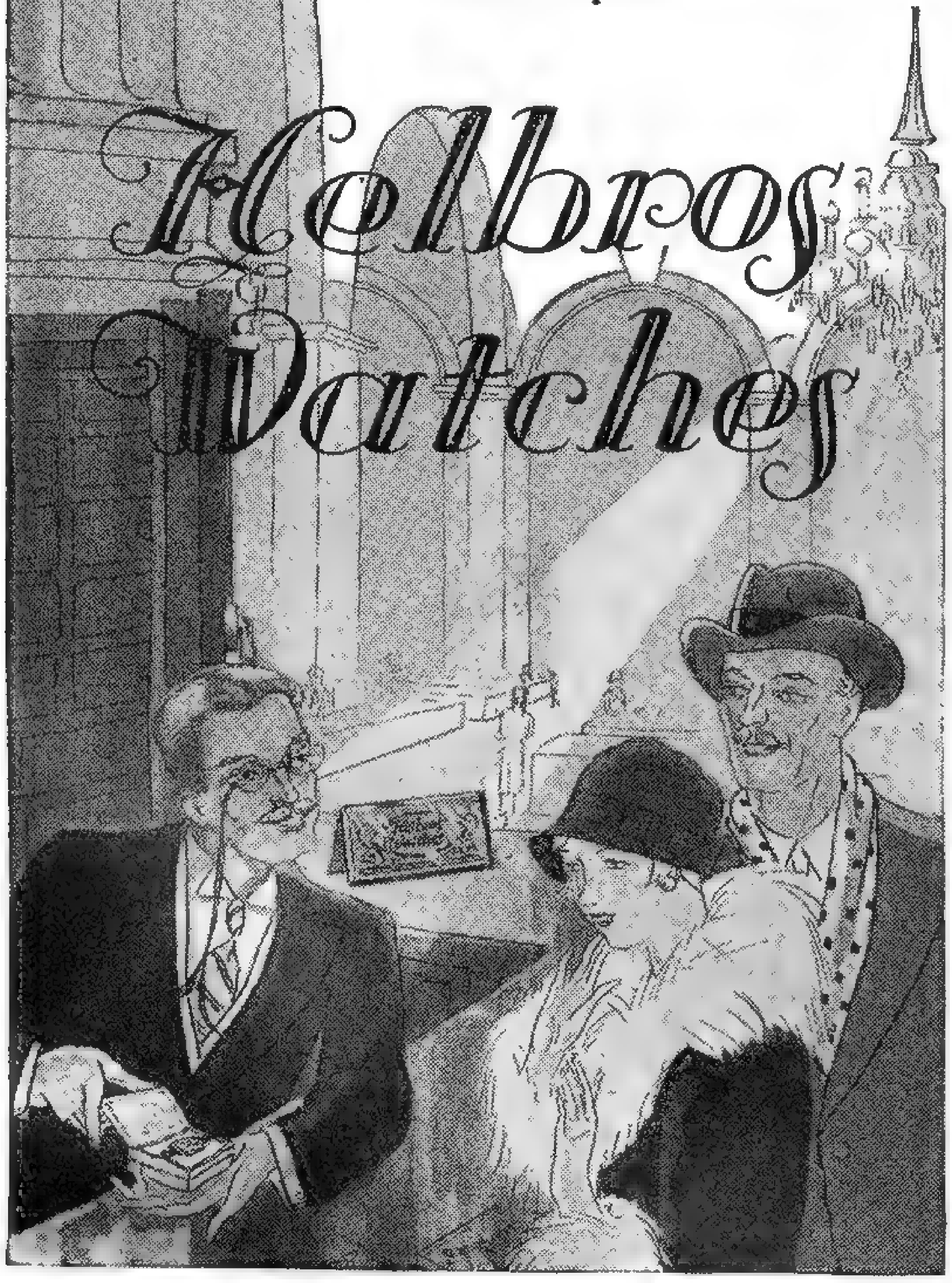
Other Helbros Styles for women and men, $1,200 to $24.

What STYLE means

STYLE in watches—as in dress, in decoration, in motor cars—means the inseparable blending of innate dependable quality with novel freshness of appearance. In the new Helbros Watch fashions, you will find not alone artistic sureness of design but also unfailing accuracy of time-keeping mechanism.

HELBROS WATCH CO., INC., NEW YORK
22 West 48th Street

Folder of newest Helbros Watch Fashions
Free on request


Helbros
Watches

He detects the slightest trouble

If you see your dentist at least every six months he can prevent teeth decay and detect the first trace of gum infections. It is better to see him in time than to take chances with your health.

Pyorrhea robs

FOUR out of FIVE

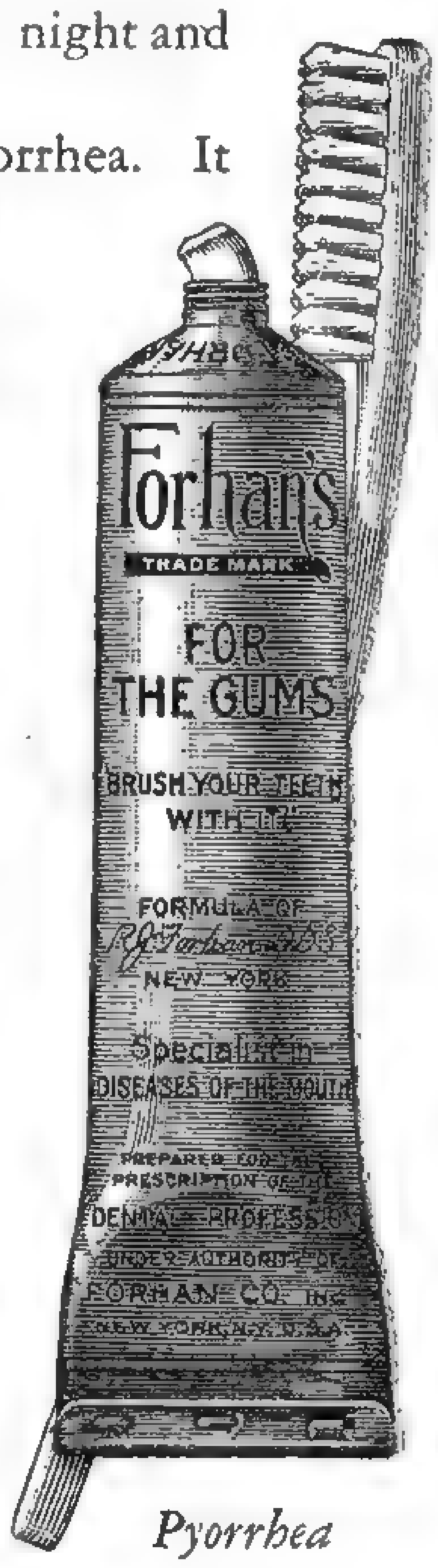
According to dental statistics, pyorrhea steals into the mouths of four out of five men and women after forty. You can tell pyorrhea's approach by tender, bleeding gums. Go to your dentist at once for treatment and be sure to use Forhan's for the Gums night and morning.

Forhan's prevents or checks pyorrhea. It contains Forhan's Pyorrhea Liquid which dentists use in combating pyorrhea's ravages. It firms the gums and keeps them pink and healthy.

The entire family should begin to use Forhan's today. Besides safeguarding the health it cleanses the teeth perfectly.

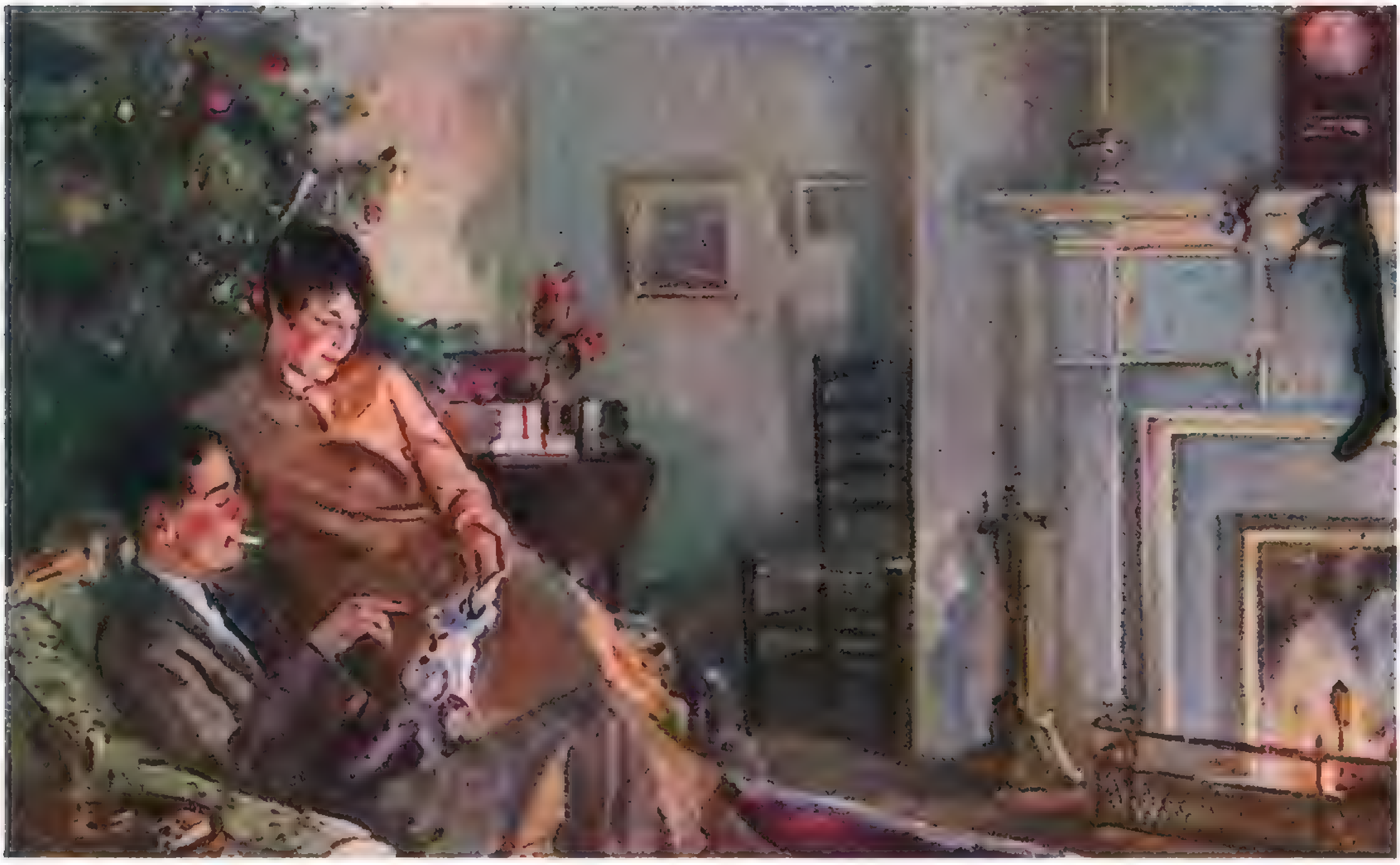
You owe it to your health to make Forhan's a regular daily habit. At all druggists 35c and 60c in tubes.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company, New York

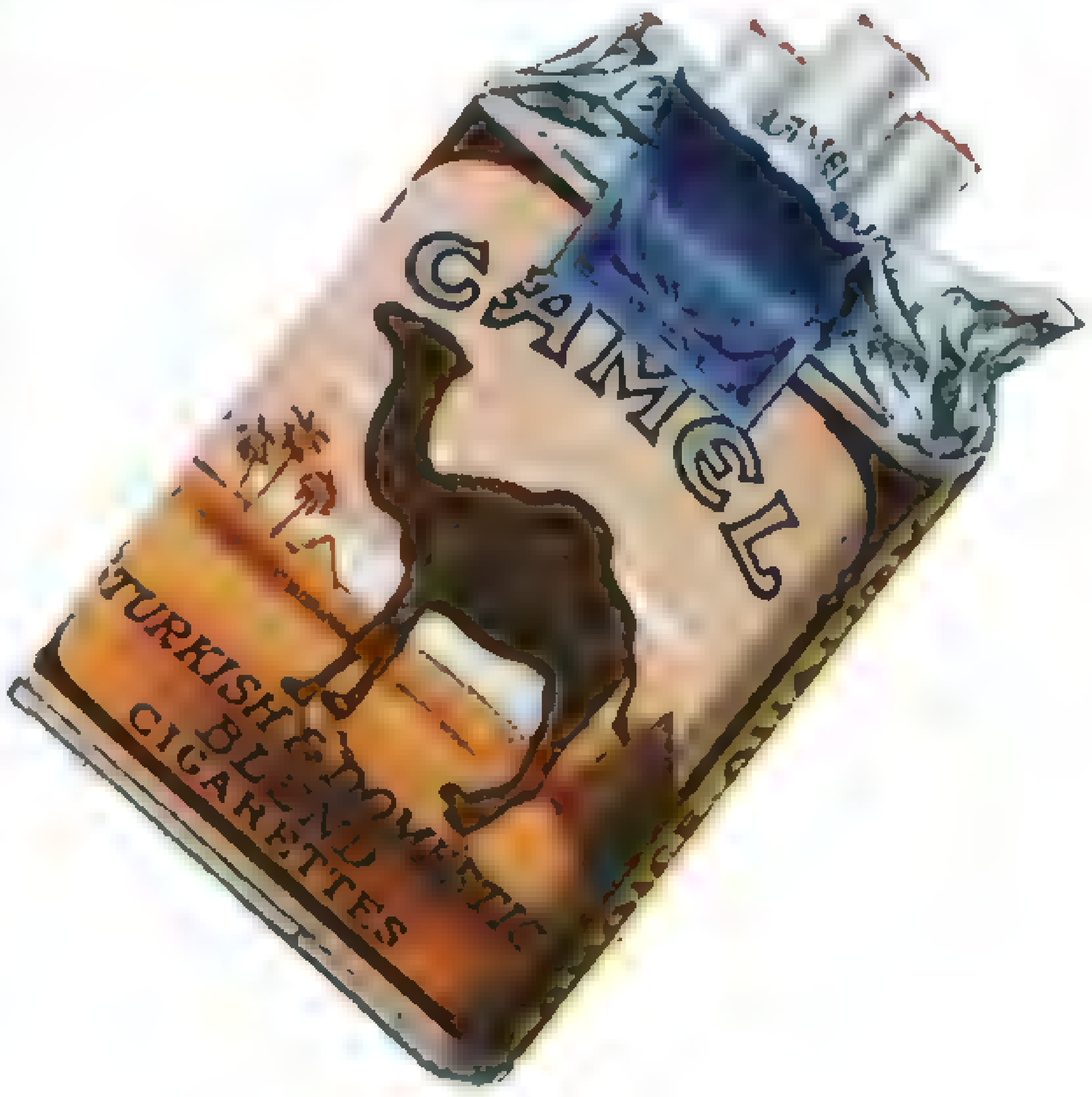

Forhan's
TRADE MARK
FOR THE GUMS
BRUSH YOUR TEETH WITH IT
FORMULA OF
NEW YORK
Specialist in
DISEASES OF THE MOUTH
PREPARED FOR THE PRESCRIPTION OF THE
DENTAL PROFESSION
UNDER AUTHORITY OF
FORHAN CO. INC.
NEW YORK N.Y. U.S.A.

Forhan's
FOR THE GUMS
More Than a Tooth Paste.. *It Checks Pyorrhea*

When the tree is trimmed for the great day—when the peace and good cheer of Christmas are almost here —have a Camel!



Camels represent the utmost in cigarette quality. The choicest of Turkish and Domestic tobaccos are blended into Camels by master blenders and the finest of French cigarette paper is made especially for them. No other cigarette is like Camels. They are the overwhelming choice of experienced smokers.



Remember your few closest friends with a supply of Camels for Christmas Day and the days to come. Mail or send your Camel cartons early, so that they will be delivered in ample time.

R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co.
Winston-Salem, N. C.

© 1926

Who's Who in Health!

They know how to banish common ills, how to gain glorious, vital health ***through one simple food***

NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active, daily releasing new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes regularly every day, one before each meal: on crackers, in fruit juices, water or milk—or just plain, in small pieces. For constipation dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before meals and at bedtime. Dangerous habit-forming cathartics will gradually become unnecessary. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days.

And let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-35, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

"SKIN ERUPTIONS covered my body. I could not rest at night. Finally someone suggested Fleischmann's Yeast. I took three cakes a day and soon I was well. That was three years ago and I have not had any skin trouble since."

Mrs. Frank G. Mehrling, Baltimore, Md.

"I HAD SICK HEADACHES brought on by indigestion. A doctor advised Fleischmann's Yeast. I have now been free from headaches for several months. Fleischmann's Yeast did for me what all other remedies failed to do."

Edward A. Sproul, Denver, Colo.

FLEISCHMANN'S
YEAST

THIS FAMOUS FOOD tones up the entire system—aids digestion—clears the skin—banishes constipation.

DANDRUFF?

Now you can control it!

YOU need worry no more about loose dandruff, that unsightly nuisance, so embarrassing to both women and men.

As you probably know, dandruff is a germ disease that no intelligent, fastidious person can afford to neglect Because so often it is a warning of more serious scalp trouble—possibly baldness.

There is one ideal treatment to control dandruff conditions — the systematic use of Listerine, the safe antiseptic. It really works wonders this way.

The use of Listerine for dandruff is not complicated. You simply douse it on your scalp, full strength, and massage thoroughly. You'll enjoy the cleansing, refreshing effect. And you will be amazed to see how this treatment, followed systematically, does the trick.

Moreover, Listerine will not discolor the hair nor will it stain fabrics. And it is not greasy.

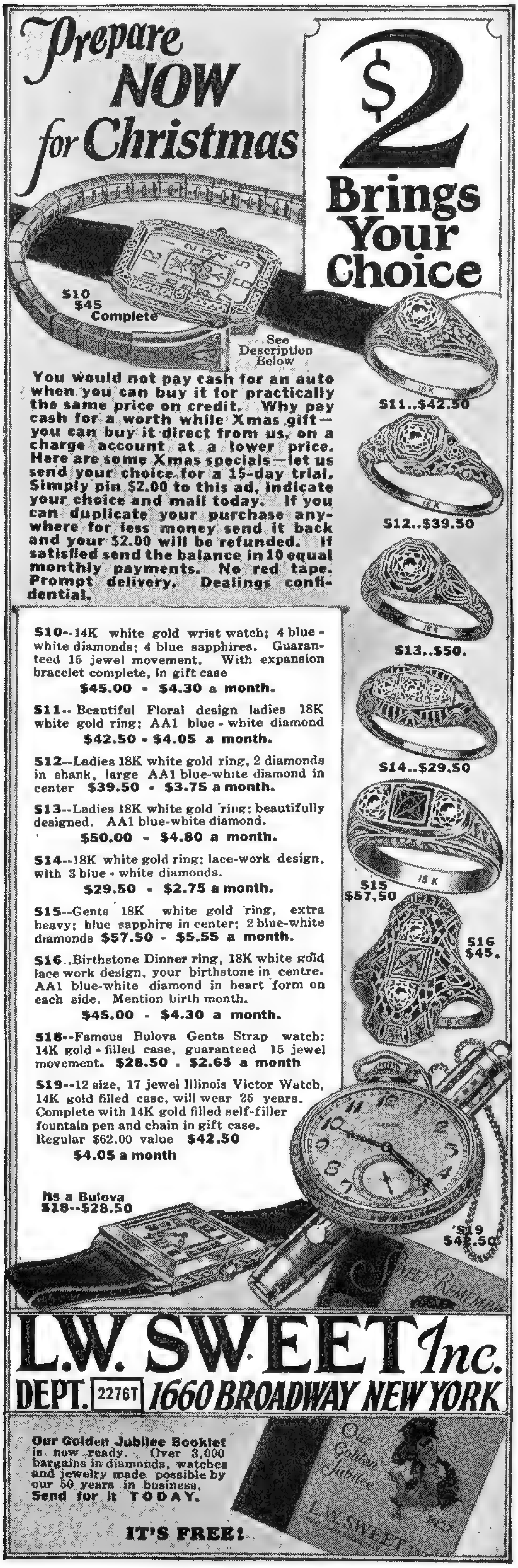
Try Listerine for dandruff. You'll be delighted with the results.

Lambert Pharmacal Co.,
St. Louis, U. S. A.

Well—it worked!
For quite a while we
challenged people to try
Listerine Tooth Paste
Sales now show that
when they try it they
stick to it!
LARGE TUBE—25 CENTS

LISTERINE

—and dandruff simply do not get along together



Prepare NOW for Christmas

$2 Brings Your Choice

You would not pay cash for an auto when you can buy it for practically the same price on credit. Why pay cash for a worth while Xmas gift—you can buy it direct from us, on a charge account at a lower price. Here are some Xmas specials—let us send your choice for a 15-day trial. Simply pin $2.00 to this ad, indicate your choice and mail today. If you can duplicate your purchase anywhere for less money send it back and your $2.00 will be refunded. If satisfied send the balance in 10 equal monthly payments. No red tape. Prompt delivery. Dealings confidential.

S10--14K white gold wrist watch; 4 blue-white diamonds; 4 blue sapphires. Guaranteed 15 jewel movement. With expansion bracelet complete, in gift case **$45.00 - $4.30 a month.**

S11-- Beautiful Floral design ladies 18K white gold ring; AA1 blue-white diamond **$42.50 - $4.05 a month.**

S12--Ladies 18K white gold ring, 2 diamonds in shank, large AA1 blue-white diamond in center **$39.50 - $3.75 a month.**

S13--Ladies 18K white gold ring; beautifully designed. AA1 blue-white diamond. **$50.00 - $4.80 a month.**

S14--18K white gold ring; lace-work design, with 3 blue-white diamonds. **$29.50 - $2.75 a month.**

S15--Gents 18K white gold ring, extra heavy; blue sapphire in center; 2 blue-white diamonds **$57.50 - $5.55 a month.**

S16..Birthstone Dinner ring, 18K white gold lace work design, your birthstone in centre. AA1 blue-white diamond in heart form on each side. Mention birth month. **$45.00 - $4.30 a month.**

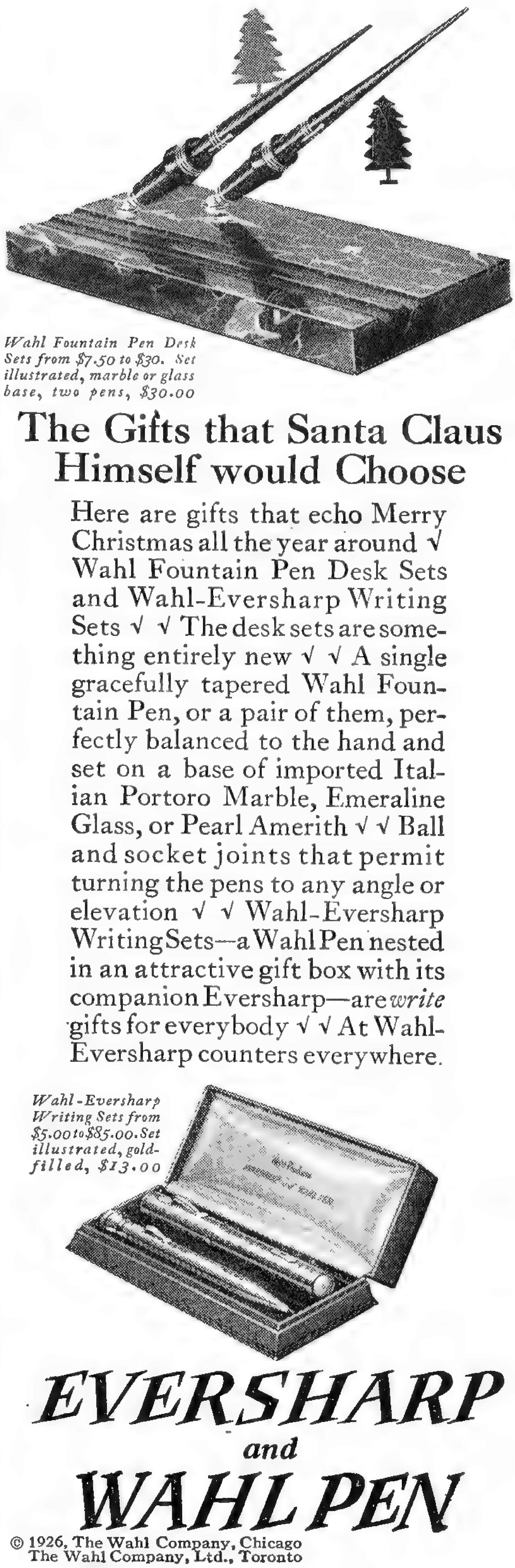
S18--Famous Bulova Gents Strap watch: 14K gold-filled case, guaranteed 15 jewel movement. **$28.50 . $2.65 a month**

S19--12 size, 17 jewel Illinois Victor Watch, 14K gold filled case, will wear 25 years. Complete with 14K gold filled self-filler fountain pen and chain in gift case. Regular $62.00 value **$42.50** **$4.05 a month**

L.W. SWEET Inc.
DEPT. 2276T 1660 BROADWAY NEW YORK

Our Golden Jubilee Booklet is now ready. Over 3,000 bargains in diamonds, watches and jewelry made possible by our 50 years in business. **Send for it TODAY.**

IT'S FREE!



Wahl Fountain Pen Desk Sets from $7.50 to $30. Set illustrated, marble or glass base, two pens, $30.00

The Gifts that Santa Claus Himself would Choose

Here are gifts that echo Merry Christmas all the year around √ Wahl Fountain Pen Desk Sets and Wahl-Eversharp Writing Sets √ √ The desk sets are something entirely new √ √ A single gracefully tapered Wahl Fountain Pen, or a pair of them, perfectly balanced to the hand and set on a base of imported Italian Portoro Marble, Emeraline Glass, or Pearl Amerith √ √ Ball and socket joints that permit turning the pens to any angle or elevation √ √ Wahl-Eversharp Writing Sets—a Wahl Pen nested in an attractive gift box with its companion Eversharp—are *write* gifts for everybody √ √ At Wahl-Eversharp counters everywhere.

Wahl-Eversharp Writing Sets from $5.00 to $85.00. Set illustrated, gold-filled, $13.00

EVERSHARP
and
WAHL PEN

© 1926, The Wahl Company, Chicago
The Wahl Company, Ltd., Toronto

Here's *the gift*

for every man on your Christmas list

MENNEN FOR MEN
MENNEN SHAVING CREAM
MENNEN TALCUM FOR MEN
SKIN BALM
MENNEN LATHER BRUSH

Mennen for Men

Christmas Gift Box

with the new Improved Lather Brush

An assortment of shaving delights for which *any* man will be genuinely grateful.

The Lather Brush for instance. A real lather builder—made of the finest and purest undyed hair and bristle. *Guaranteed.* Set in hard rubber. Sterilized. Sturdy, easy grip handle—stands where it's put.

It's easily the equal of any you can buy for $4.00 to $5.00. Nine men out of ten need it. Steal a glimpse at *his* old brush. How he'll appreciate this new one!

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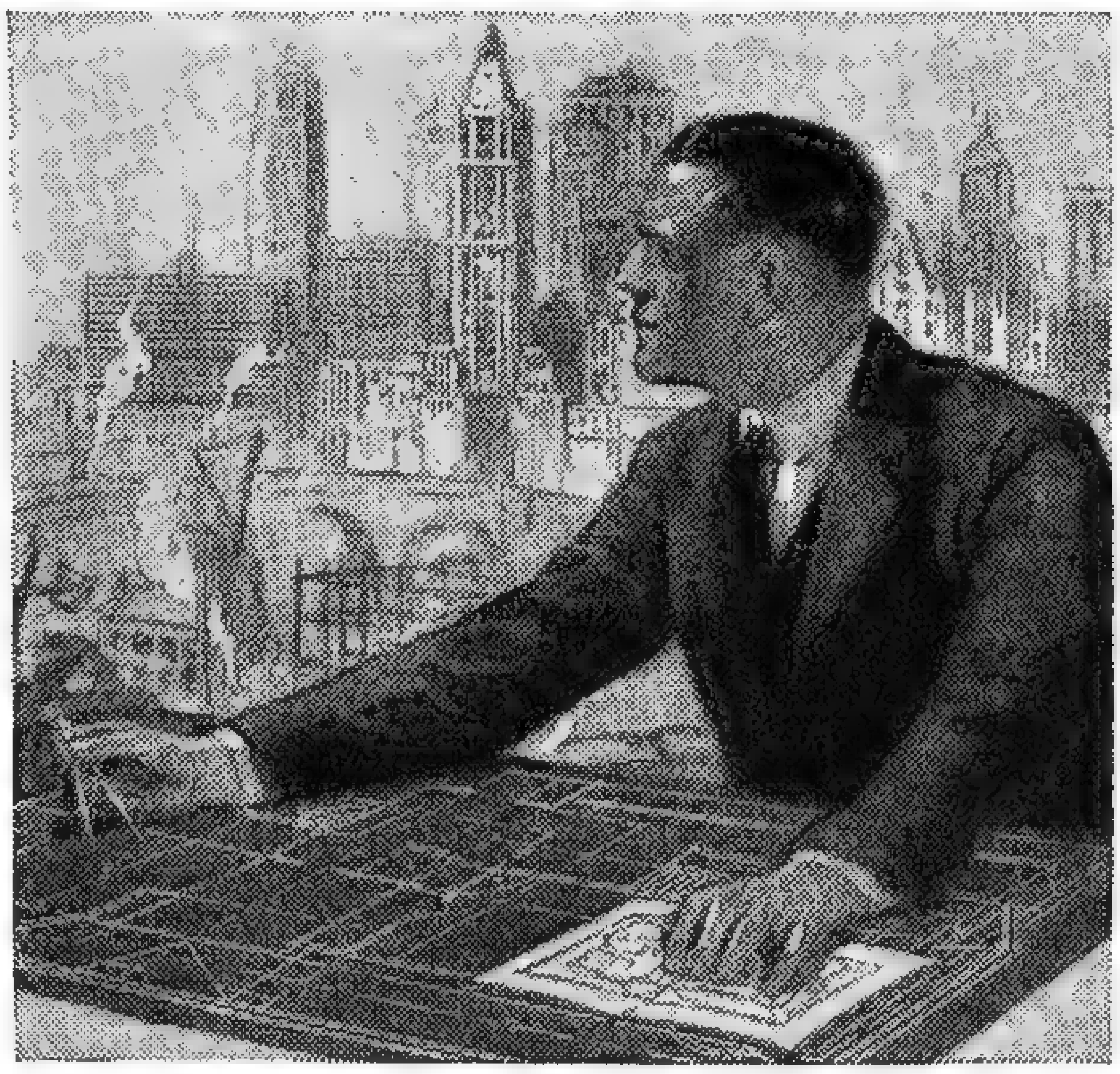

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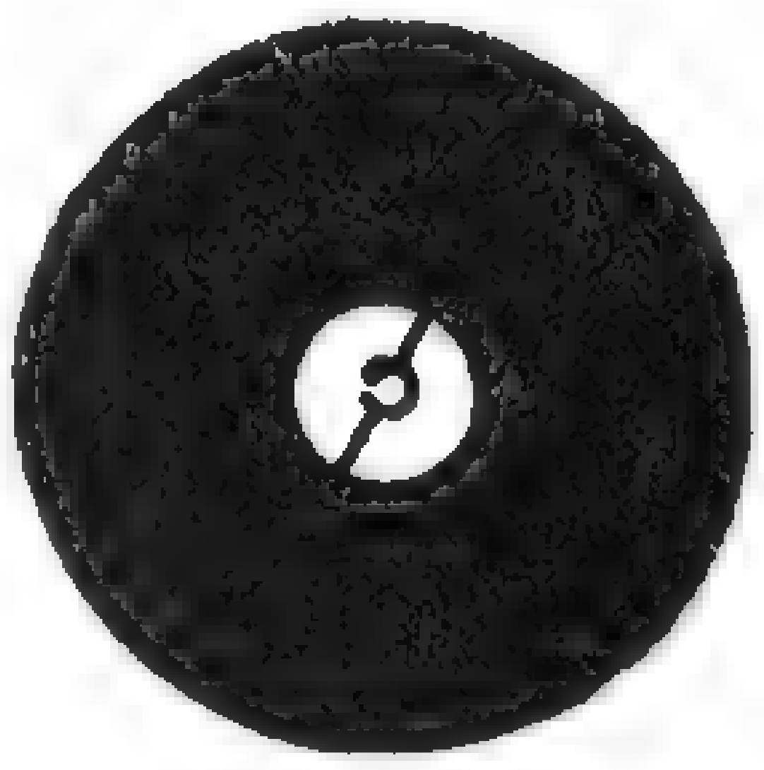

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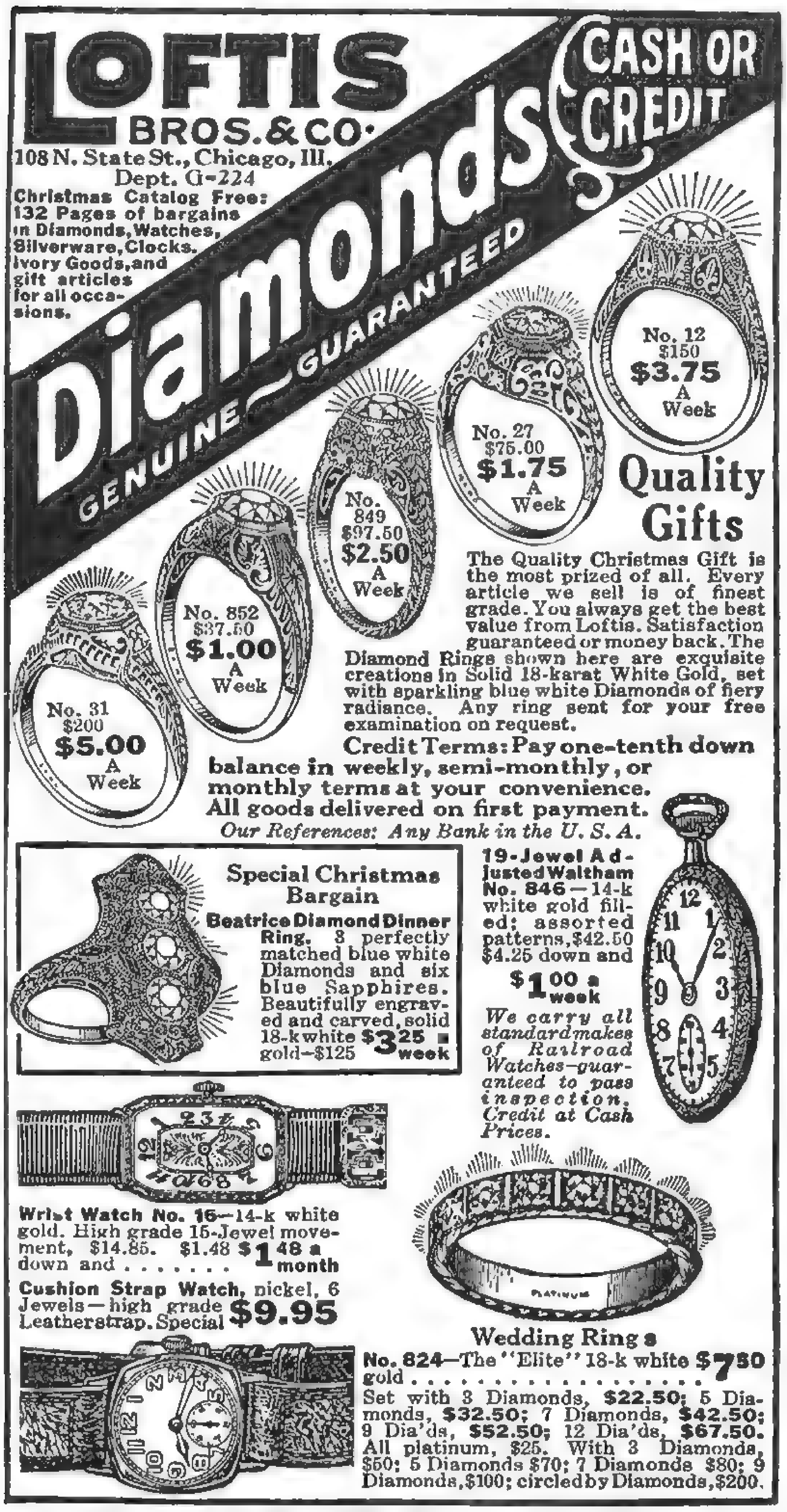

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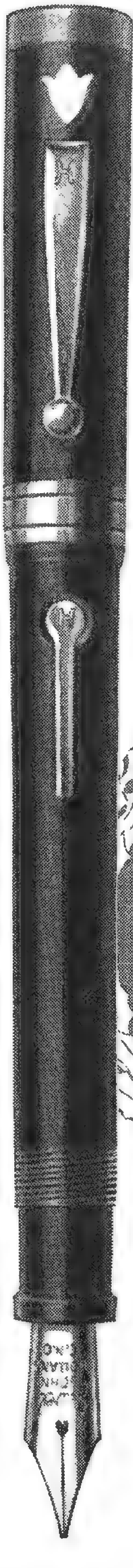

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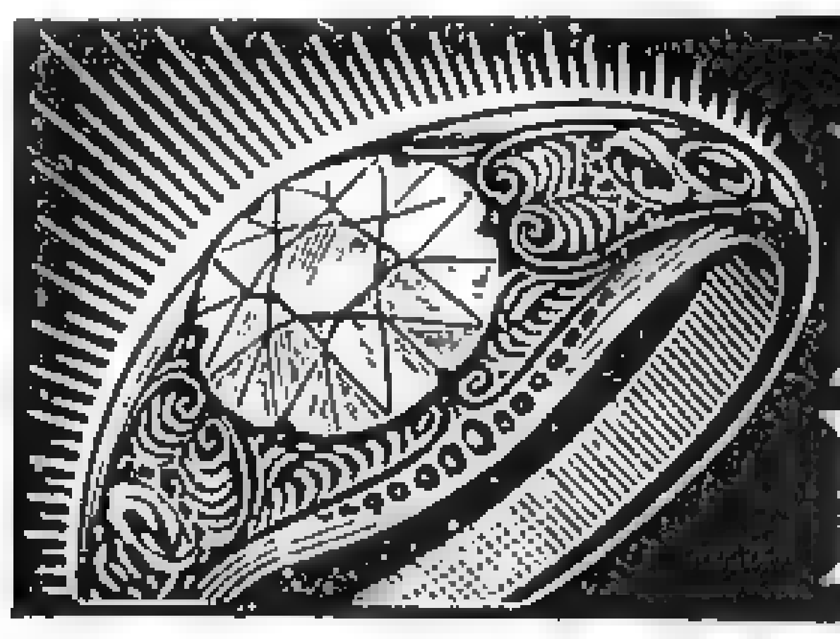

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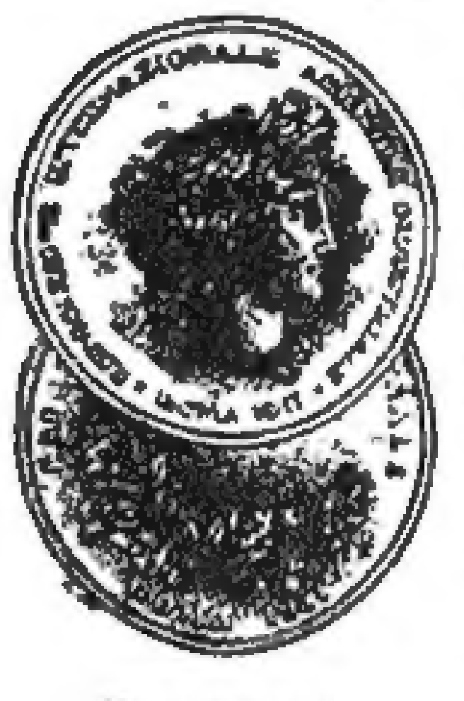

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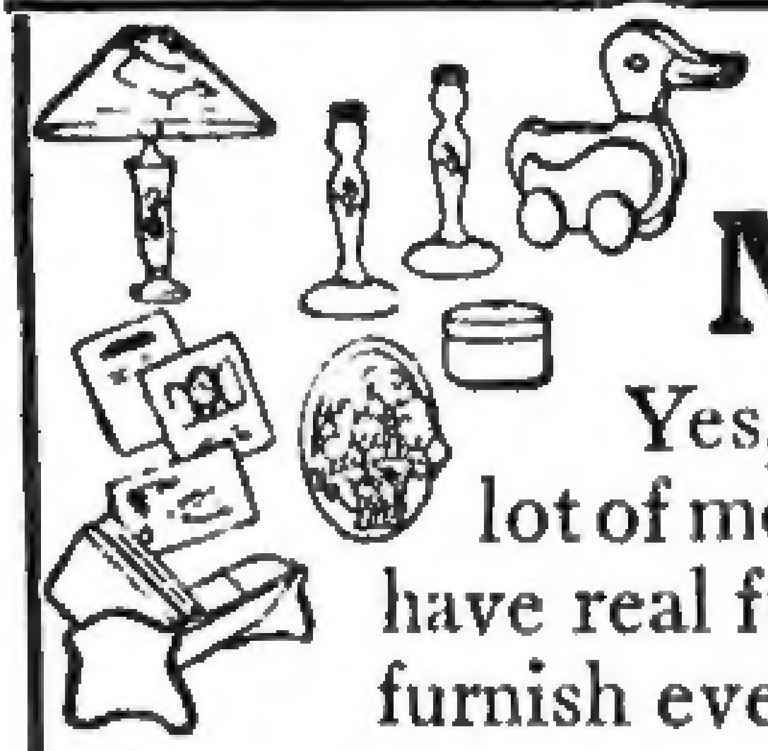

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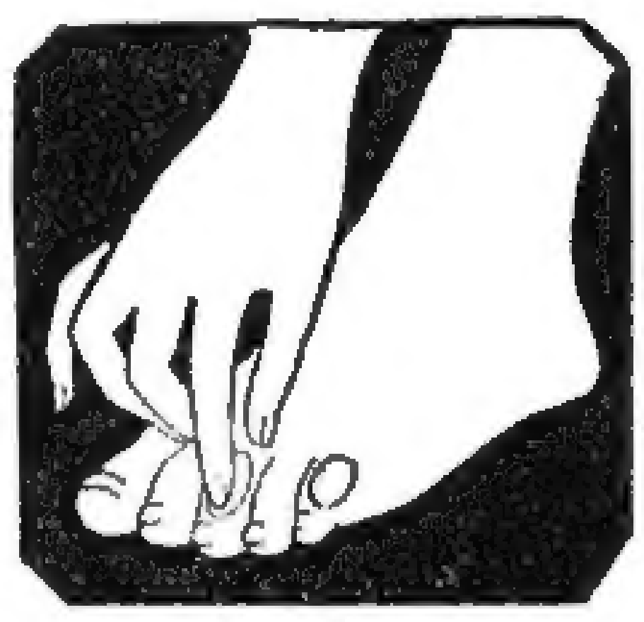

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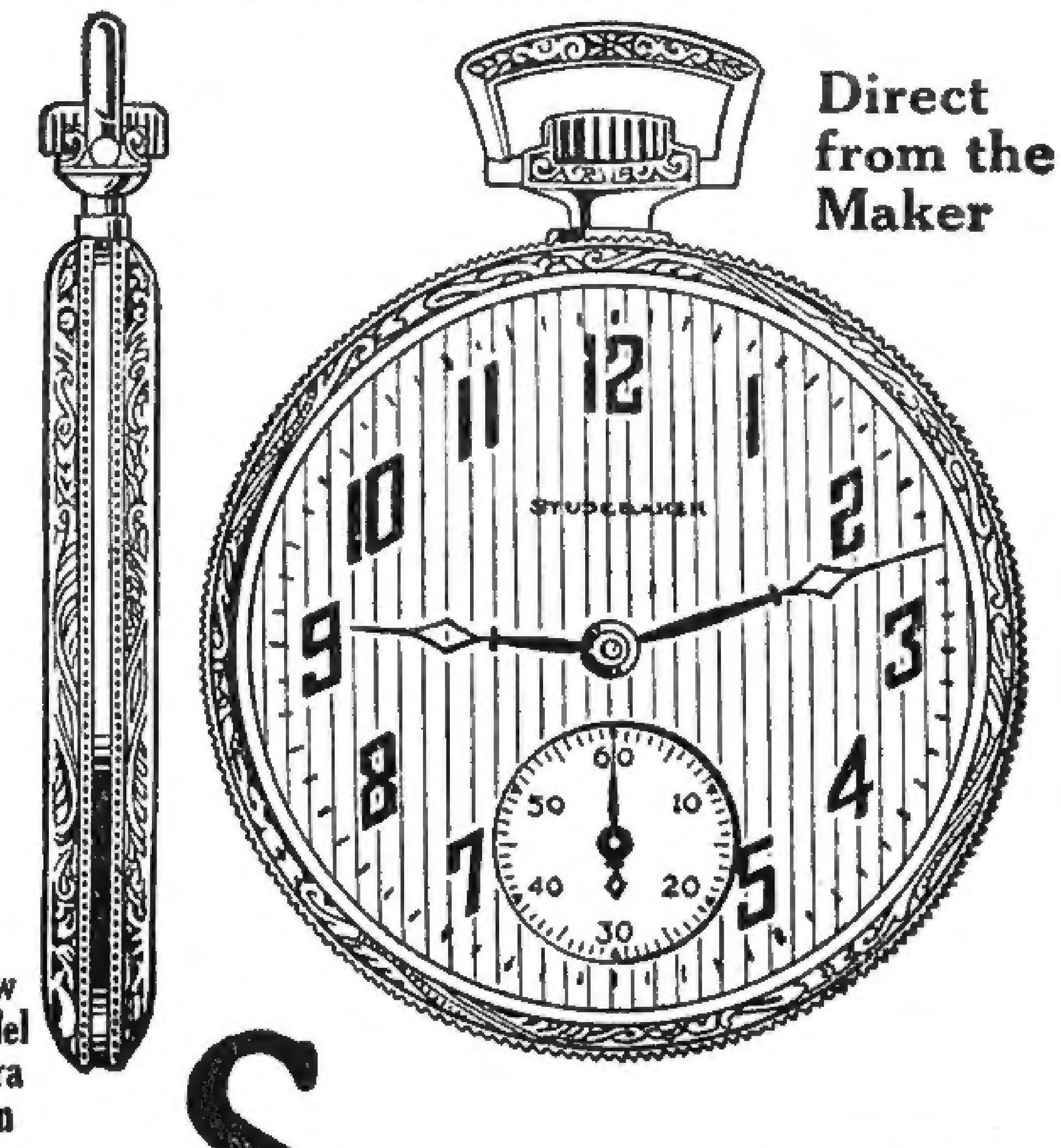

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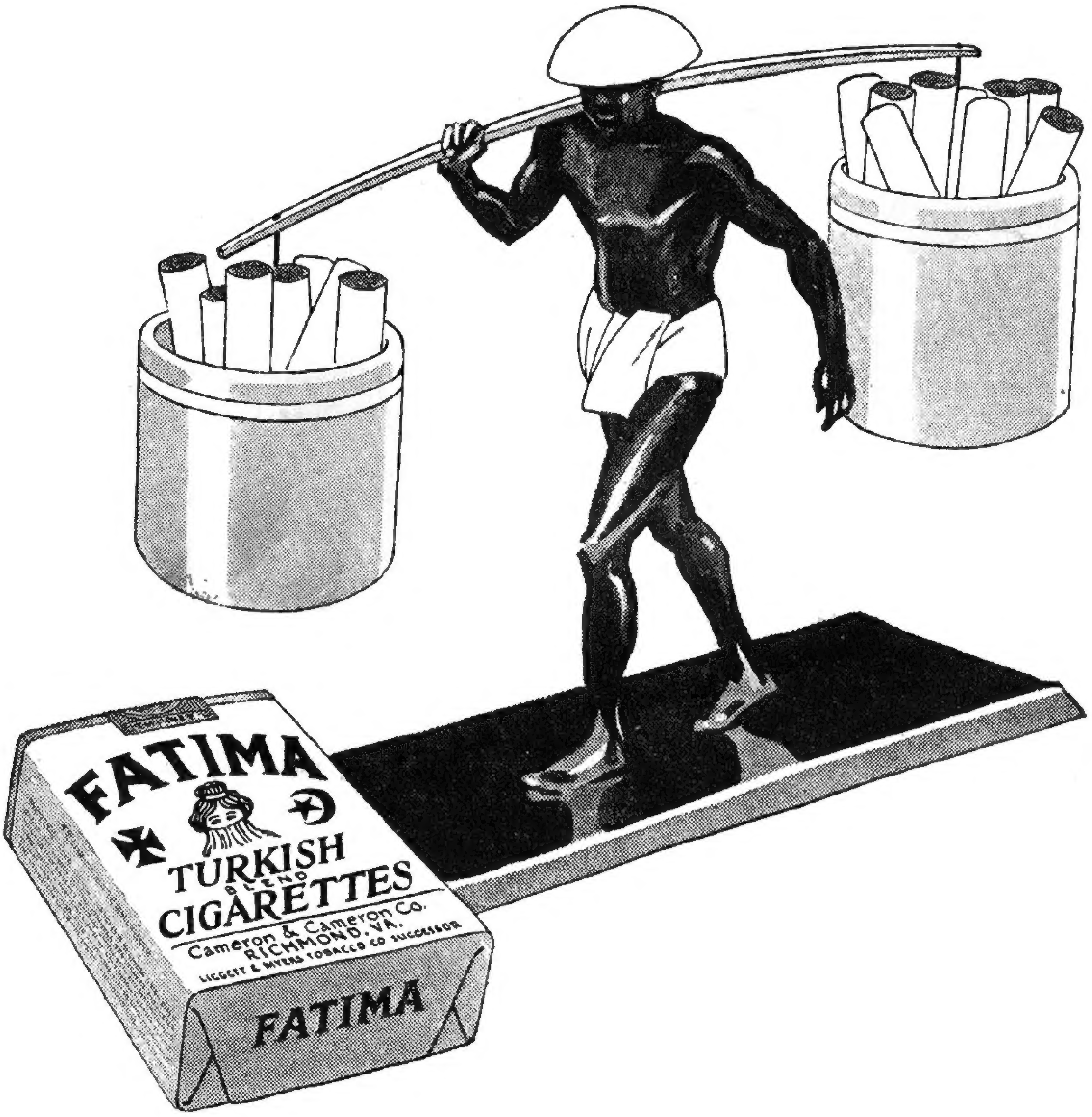
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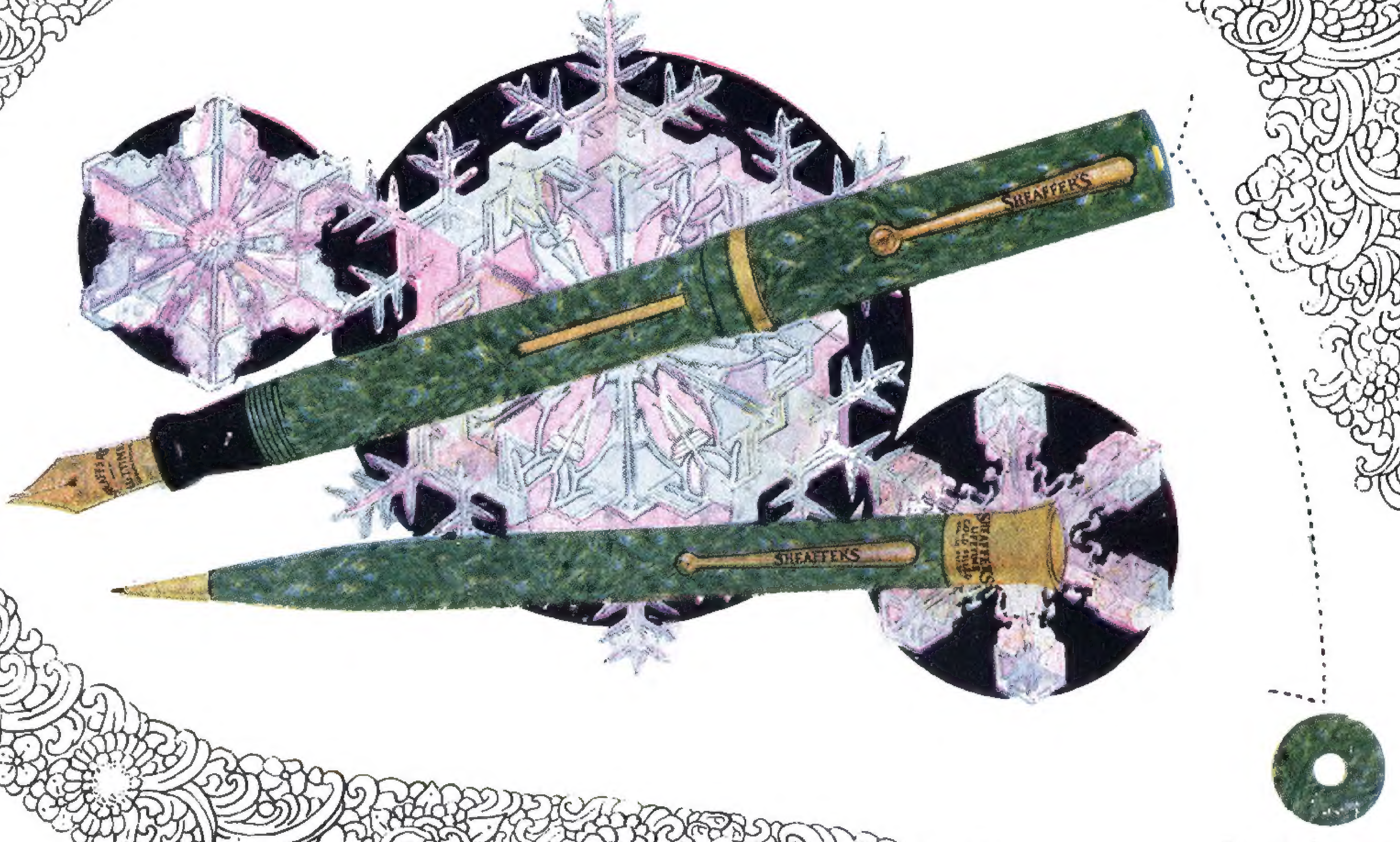

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